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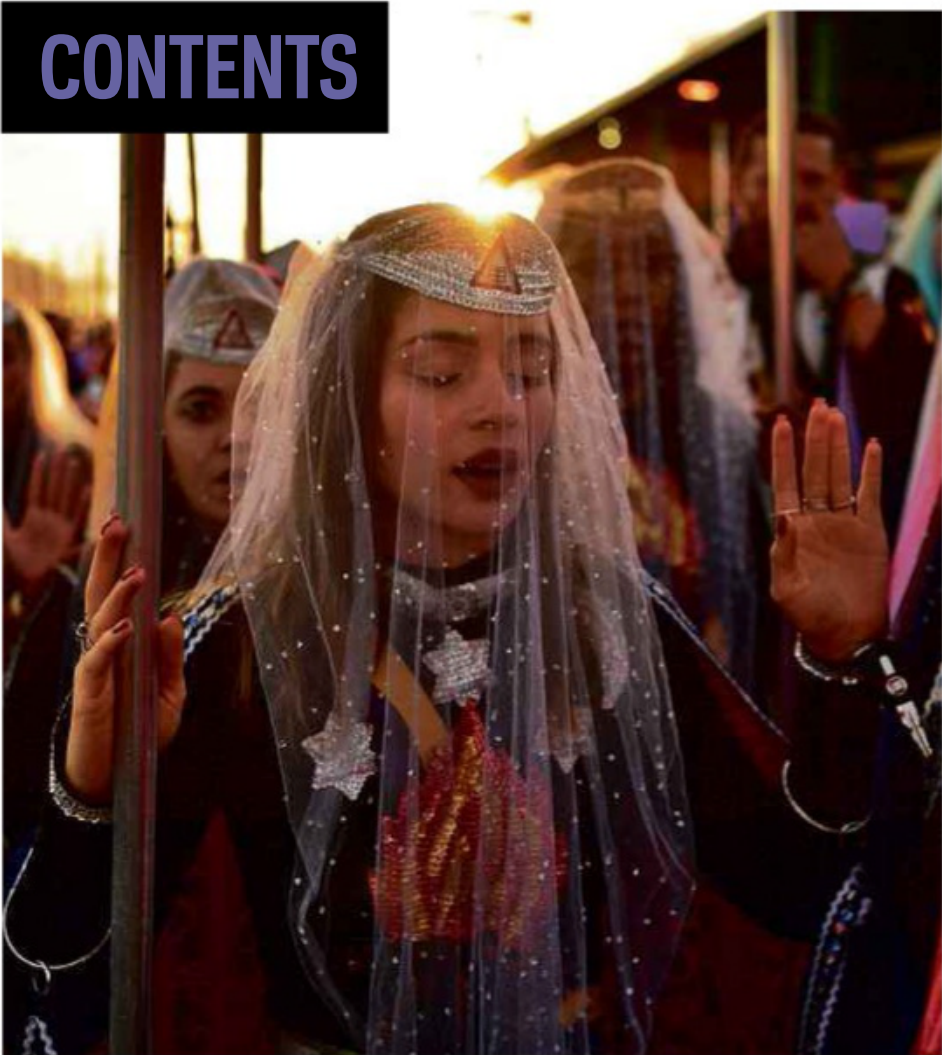


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STRANGE DAYS

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT HOWARD

Back in February, in these pages, Richard Stanley, in a provocative and wide-ranging article on one of the 20th century's cult literary figures (FT390:28-36), predicted that "2020 will be remembered as the year HP Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos entered the mainstream." In the timeline we now inhabit, it seems likely that 2020 will be remembered not so much for the spread of the 'Mythos Meme' through popular culture as the spread of Covid-19 through a large part of the world's population; now, metaphorical memes feel like a luxury, supplanted by the harsher reality of an actual virus.

We suspect that this is an irony that Lovecraft, with his limitless reserves of misanthropy and cosmic nihilism, would have noted, and possibly even relished. But, then, in another unforeseen turn of events, the killing of the Black American George Floyd by white police and the subsequent explosion of outrage and protest around the world, put issues of culture and representation back on the table, and in an urgent way: suddenly, statues were being toppled across the US and here in the UK.

Perhaps there was a portent of such iconoclasm when, in 2015, the World Fantasy Awards announced that winners would no longer be presented with the 'Howard' statuettes that had been in use for four decades. The decision was taken, after much soul-searching and passionate debate, following a petition and campaign proposing such a change on the grounds that handing out busts of an avowed racist wasn't a good look for a literature that champions diversity.

There's no getting around Lovecraft's racism: it's hideously apparent in his letters and present in grotesquely sublimated form in his stories, part and parcel of a worldview that expresses an utter loathing of physical existence; you don't have to be a card-carrying Freudian to see that much of HPL's 'horror' is a form of psycho-sexual projection: his alienation, misanthropy and, yes, his racism, speak not just of fear of the 'other' but of an all-consuming self-disgust at finding oneself embodied and human.

In this issue (pp.36-41), lifelong Lovecraft fan Gary Lachman grapples with some biographical material that throws light on HPL's experience of both race and

sexuality: his marriage to the Jewish Sonia Greene and the disintegration of their relationship while living in a largely immigrant area of Brooklyn, New York. It's uncomfortable stuff, and Gary worries

that, in the current climate of 'cancel culture', we'll soon see calls for Lovecraft to be banned. We'd hope that, as in much of the debate that took place around the 'Howard' awards, the complex relationships between a writer's life, work and wider culture will continue to be explored. We cannot, and should not, make excuses for Lovecraft's racism; our job

as readers, writers or critics is to think seriously about the ways it informs, or indeed deforms, his art, as uncomfortable as that process may prove.

GETTING COPIES OF FT

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ERRATA

FT395:8: Not so much an erratum as a clarification. The accusation that Mary Chipperfield released or lost ABCs on Dartmoor originated with Ellis Daw, Benjamin Mee's predecessor as Dartmoor Zoo director, and was denied by Mary Chipperfield's widower, who said: "We... certainly never released pumas or any other wild animals on Dartmoor" [FT344:21].

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

THE MOTH SHALL RISE AGAIN

As Confederate statues are toppled, Mothman enters the culture wars

Amid the worldwide movement seeking to remove statues of historical figures now deemed problematic, in West Virginia there is a growing campaign to replace them with images of an alternative local hero – Mothman. The initiative took off on 8 June when 24-year-old Twitter user Brenna (@HumanBrennapede) proposed a petition in support of replacing Confederate statues with those of the legendary cryptid. “As a West Virginia native, I’d like to think we’re all spiritually connected to him,” she explained.

Jay Sisson, 30, a teacher and another proud West Virginian, decorates his ninth-grade classroom with what he believes to be uplifting figures from the state’s past: Sasquatch, the Flatwoods Monster, and, of course, Mothman. He believes these “brave but often misunderstood heroes represent a certain rugged individualism and perseverance” that he found inspirational as a child, and hopes they will have the same effect on his pupils.

“I want my students to love their home, to make it better despite the problems that exist here. I want them to see the good that exists here,” he said. “I want our community to beat the odds, and the Mothman can embody that spirit because it’s ours. It’s a symbol for something bigger.”

He has called for a statue of General Stonewall Jackson at the State Capitol, the seat of West Virginia’s government, to be torn down and substituted by “another



ABOVE: The Mothman statue in Point Pleasant, West Virginia, was unveiled in 2003 – but should this harbinger of death and disaster really be celebrated?

statue of West Virginia’s own mascot and son, the Mothman. Repeat indefinitely until all Confederate monuments are replaced. This is the way.”

It’s curious that Mothman is being presented as a positive symbol, since the cryptid is associated with death and disaster, originally appearing in the town of Point Pleasant

when locals spotted a “man-sized bird creature” just prior to the town’s 1967 Silver Bridge collapse that killed 46 people (see FT156:26-54; 187:44-48; 311:26; 393:17). Mothman is said to have manifested in Moscow shortly before Russia’s 1999 apartment bombings and has allegedly been seen foreshadowing several other

tragedies.

Nevertheless, Point Pleasant held the first Mothman Festival in 2002, unveiling a 12ft (3.7 metre) metallic Mothman statue the following year (see FT334:21), and opened the Mothman Museum and Research Center in 2005.

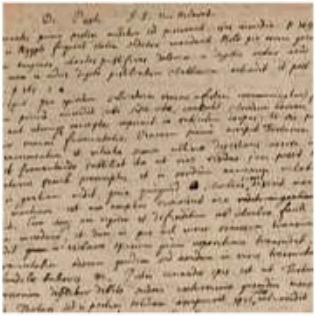
Sisson suggests West Virginia’s small population, years of economic depression and population loss “have bonded our population, especially the younger generation, very tightly together,” and that one manifestation of this is the local stories and oddities that West Virginians “find a sense of comfort in sharing.” Another Twitter user, Bryson, 22, has proposed Mothman as a gay icon, perhaps on account of his statue having, according to Brenna: “a six-pack and an objectively good ass,” a sentiment echoed by Badbunny the Fourth (@mecasloth), who tweeted:

“Reasons why mothman is better than the Confederate statues:

1. Not racist
 2. Not explicitly a symbol of white supremacy
 3. Not a symbol of slavery
- [...]

1007. Mothman has a thicker ass than any confederate general.”

A Twitter Mothman bot (@mothmanbot) currently has nearly 26,000 followers. Its creator, 22-year-old Gray, has suggested that Mothman fandom may arise from a shared sense of “feeling othered or isolated,” adding that “in a lot of depictions he looks so soft and furry you can’t help but think of him as a friend who would protect you from all kinds of terrible people.” *melmagazine.com*, 15 June 2020.



AUCTION ODDITIES

Some strange
items go under
the hammer

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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Snakes in a
pillowcase and
other updates

PAGE 24



BERSERKER WOMBAT

Cuddly-looking
marsupial on
violent rampage

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THE LAST LEPRECHAUN WHISPERER

Little People coping well with coronavirus lockdown says their custodian

Ireland's last leprechaun whisperer assured viewers of ITV's *This Morning* that the Irish fairies are coping well with coronavirus lockdown. Kevin Woods, from Carlingford in County Louth, is a prominent leprechaun advocate who successfully lobbied the EU to have a nearby mountain recognised as a 'Designated Area of Protection for Flora, Fauna, Wild Animals and Little People', under the EU Habitats Directive. He also runs a tour firm called 'Last Leprechauns of Ireland', describing himself as a 'custodian' of the iconic Irish sprites.

Although Ireland has been gravely affected by the pandemic, Mr Woods told viewers that Ireland's leprechauns "don't have a problem with it". He also sought to reassure the public that he had not broken any lockdown measures during his encounters: since leprechauns are actually spirits who manifest themselves to him, he hadn't transgressed embargoes against face-to-face meetings with people.

Sadly, though, their numbers have fallen in recent years. "There were millions of them here in Ireland and they all died, apart from 236 of them," he told hosts Ruth Langford and Eamon Holmes. "I'm really the custodian of them and their lives and I've been doing that since I got them a protected species." He explained that although most people cannot see leprechauns, he has special powers that mean they appear to him every day. "I communicate with them through an out-of-body experience," he explained.

Although his tour business has taken a hit due to lockdown restrictions, Mr Woods said he's not worried: "It's not really business to me, I have enough access to the gold. I don't need the business. I do it to tell people the story is true." *independent.ie*, 24 Feb 2010; *irishpost*, 28 May 2020.



TOP: Leprechaun whisperer and advocate for the Little People, Kevin Woods.
ABOVE: Sharing the stories of Ireland's leprechauns is one part of his work.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**BOLIVIAN
ORCHESTRA
STRANDED AT
'HAUNTED'
GERMAN CASTLE
SURROUNDED BY
WOLVES**

nypost.com, 23 May 2020

**These Peruvian
plants remem-
ber the past and
try and repeat it**

New York Times, 4 May 2019.

**GUARD 'HAD
SEAMEN THROWN
AT HER IN JAIL'**

Morning Star, — Aug 2019.

**I chinned a
seagull but
now we are
good mates**

D.Star, 22 Aug 2019.

**MONSTER
PLANTING PLAN
FOR LOCH NESS**

D.Telegraph, 29 Oct 2019.



CORONAVIRUS CORNER

Another round-up of the strangest news stories from around our Covid-19-ravaged planet



ABOVE: A typical Victorian guardian angel. Cardinal Nichols (below) has suggested they could attend mass on behalf of worshippers while churches remain closed.

GUARDIAN ANGELS

In his pastoral letter addressing church closures during the coronavirus pandemic, Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster and spokesman for the Roman Catholic church in England and Wales, has suggested people ask for the intercession of a guardian angel; while human beings cannot currently enter churches for Holy Communion, they may ask an angel to act on their behalf, since locked doors present no barrier to them. He quoted a prayer beginning:

“Dear Guardian Angel, go for me to the church, there kneel down at Mass for me... During Holy Communion, bring to me the Body and Blood of Jesus uniting Him with me in spirit, so that my heart may become His dwelling place... When the Mass ends, bring home to me and to every home, the Lord’s blessing”.

Although sometimes thought of as a Victorian invention, the idea of guardian angels has enjoyed great longevity;

in the New Testament, Jesus says: “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). St Jerome, the Bible translator, commenting on this verse, wrote that “the dignity of a soul is so great, that each has a guardian angel from its birth.” An 11th century prayer by Benedictine monk Reginald of Canterbury begins: “Angele, qui meus es custos pietate superna...” (“Angel, who is my dear guardian in Heaven”) And Lady Lucy Herbert (1669-1744), who lived as a nun for 50 years, suggested in her Devotions that people spend one day a month in conscious company with their guardian angel, “your father and best of friends”. *D.Telegraph*, 4 Apr 2020.

CONSPIRACY CARDINALS

Several high-ranking Catholic clergy have signed a letter claiming that the coronavirus pandemic is being exploited to restrict human rights “disproportionately and unjustifiably”, and that the risk of contagion has been overstated by authorities. The letter, whose signatories include the German Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller, Italy’s Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò and the former bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun, strongly criticises the lockdowns imposed by

governments around the world. “We have reason to believe,” the letter said, “that there are powers interested in creating panic among the world’s population with the sole aim of permanently

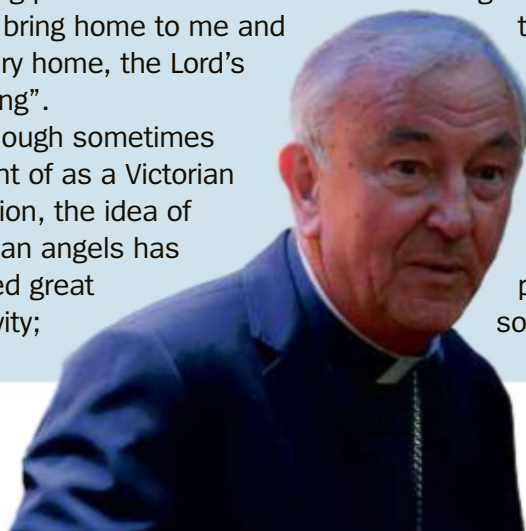
imposing unacceptable forms of restriction on freedoms, of controlling people and of tracking their movements. The imposition of these illiberal measures is a disturbing prelude to the realisation of a World Government beyond all control.” It also warned that “centuries of Christian civilisation” could be erased and replaced by an “odious technological tyranny.”

Germany’s Catholic bishops were swift to dissociate themselves from the letter. “The German Bishops’ Conference’s assessment of the coronavirus pandemic is fundamentally different to the appeal published yesterday,” a statement read. Other German Catholic clergymen were harsher in their criticism. Klaus Pfeffer, vicar general of the city of Essen, said he was “simply speechless at what was being published there in the name of the Church and Christianity: crude conspiracy theories without facts or evidence, combined with aggressive right-wing populist rhetoric that sounds alarming.”

Archbishop Viganò and Cardinal Müller have both criticised Pope Francis, and the former has alleged that Vatican officials ignored warnings about disgraced former cardinal Theodore McCarrick’s sexual abuse. *catholicherald.co.uk*, 8 May, *dw.com*, 10 May 2020.

CHEATING GHOST LOVER

A New Jersey man who claims to have had a ghost girlfriend for two years says the coronavirus lockdown has damaged their relationship. Gary De Noia, 36, told a newspaper that relations with his incorporeal partner Lisa were initially fine. “At first, we spent every day together for a month. Jersey City was an





epicentre early on during this, especially where we live,” he explained. “I’m by nature a very anxious person. On top of not being able to see my family or nieces, I was feeling very afraid. I’m usually the strong one in the relationship but I was just too overwhelmed to hold it together. In that month, Lisa was my rock. She’d help me cook and fold laundry. Watch loads of TV. And obviously have sex. All the time. It was fun, but exhausting. I’m not in great shape, so it was hard to keep up.”

But the unemployed American now fears his spectral lover is cheating on him. “This past month she’s out all the time. Never tells me where she’s going. Just says she’s going ‘out with friends’. She could be anywhere with anyone. And I’ve always felt secure in our relationship, but lately we haven’t been having much sex. I’m worried that she’s cheating on me. She says I’m being paranoid. I mean, I’m not crazy, am I?”

Gary said he feels unable to talk to his family about his relationship troubles, as they are currently too concerned about the pandemic. “Growing up in Italian-American culture, I was raised not to burden people with my problems. It’s possible this is all in my mind and I’m overthinking it. Isolation is taking its toll.” *dailystar.co.uk*, 9 May 2020.

CANINE COVID SQUAD

Sniffer dogs will be taught to detect asymptomatic coronavirus infection in a government-backed initiative. The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) is to begin training three cocker spaniels, two labradors and a labradoodle, using samples obtained from patients who tested positive. It is already known that dogs’ highly-sensitive olfactory senses allow them to detect a range of illnesses in humans; UK-based charity Medical Detection Dogs has already trained canines to sniff out cancer, Parkinson’s



ABOVE: Jersey City resident Gary de Noia is having a difficult lockdown; he suspects Lisa, his ghostly girlfriend of two years, has been cheating on him.

“She says I’m being paranoid. I mean, I’m not crazy, am I?”

and bacterial infections (see **FT 339:22-23, 393:8-9**).

Respiratory problems, a common coronavirus symptom, are known to cause subtle changes in the body’s aroma, and research indicates dogs can be trained to recognise the odour of disease even when present in only minute quantities – the equivalent dilution of one teaspoon of sugar in two Olympic-sized swimming pools. If the training programme is successful, dogs could be deployed at entrances to pubs or restaurants, or could be walked through care homes identifying people who should be segregated and tested. *D.Telegraph*, 23 Apr, 16 May 2020.

MASTURBATE FOR HEALTH

A doctor has suggested

that self-isolating individuals pleasure themselves during their enforced stay indoors, as masturbation is known to boost the immune system. Dr Jennifer Landam, a specialist in hormone therapy, said that self-love also helps raise white blood cell counts. A study conducted by the Department of Medical Psychology at Germany’s Essen University Clinic supported her claims, and additionally, orgasms are known to aid relaxation and sleep – and sleep allows the body to repair and recover. *thescottishsun.co.uk*, 18 Mar 2020.

BREAST IS BEST

Hoping to prevent infection, or to boost their chances of survival if they fall sick with the coronavirus, some people have turned to various unorthodox remedies. People are drinking fish tank cleaner (see **FT394:7**), bleach and colloidal silver, but perhaps the oddest recent trend in the USA is breast milk, drunk by adults in hopes of boosting their immunity.

Online breast milk vendors are an established market in the US. Websites feature self-

described ‘overproducers’, who market their milk to mothers who underproduce or to single fathers or gay men who can’t produce their own milk. Breast milk is classified as food, so can be sold without the regulations that otherwise apply to bodily fluids. Sellers report earnings of up to £16,000 a year, with their milk fetching up to £2.40 an ounce.

Even before coronavirus, adults were drinking breast milk for its known benefits to infants’ immune systems. Exposure to certain viruses makes mothers produce antibodies that pass into their milk. Complex sugars called oligosaccharides in human milk also help ward off harmful gut bacteria. Previous customers have included people with chronic autoimmune disorders; other customers have included fetishists and body builders. Now, sellers are reporting increased sales, and requests for breast milk from donors who have recovered from coronavirus, because of its assumed antibodies. Although discouraged by health experts, the principle behind it is being studied by at least two prominent universities.

“It’s an interesting idea,” said Lars Bode, chair of Collaborative Human Milk Research at the University of California, San Diego. “Maybe not the right thing to do for multiple different reasons.” But it is “not too far-fetched,” he says, that human milk could contain coronavirus-fighting properties. His lab is seeking to ascertain whether the virus can be spread through breast milk, and will test whether the milk contains antibodies or oligosaccharides capable of warding off the virus, and whether those oligosaccharides can be synthetically produced at a larger scale. Researchers at New York’s Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai are also running a study into whether breast milk contains coronavirus antibodies. *thedailybeast.com*, 14 Apr 2020.

THE VALLEY OF THE DAWN



Every year on 1 May, before sunrise, several thousand people silently congregate at a temple outside the Brazilian capital of Brasília. They are Members of the Vale do Amanhecer ('Valley of the Dawn') religious group, and this 'Day of the Indoctrinator' ceremony, attracts devotees from around the world to 'synchronise their spiritual energies'. As the Sun's rays appear over the horizon, a collective droning sound fills the air as the devotees, wearing elaborate and brightly-coloured costumes, begin chanting their personal 'emissions', intended to invoke cosmic forces which they then believe may be 'manipulated' for healing purposes. This year's ceremony, of course, was postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Devotees of the group say they belong to a 'spiritual tribe' called the Jaguars, supposedly the reincarnated descendants of highly advanced extraterrestrials sent by God 32,000 years ago to jump-start human evolution. Founded in 1959 by Neiva Chavez Zelaya, a Brazilian truck driver and medium known as Tia (Aunt) Neiva, Vale do Amanhecer is recognised as a religion in Brazil, where its members are mainly middle- and working-class Brazilians of all races. It has nearly 139,000 registered members and 700 affiliated temples around the world, with adherents in the USA, Japan, Bolivia, Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Germany, Italy, Portugal and the UK.

Tia Neiva, who was born in 1926 and died

of a respiratory illness in 1985, prophesied that the world as we know it would end within a few decades. The group's doctrines include elements of Brazilian Candomblé and Espiritismo, Christianity, ancient Egyptian religion and UFO beliefs. In its early days the group was known by at least two different names: União Espiritualista Seta Branca (Spiritualist Union White Arrow) between 1959 and 1964, and then Obras Sociais da Ordem Espiritualista Cristã (Social Works of the Spiritual Christian Order).

The Templo Mãe (Mother Temple) where the ceremony is held is the focal point of a complex built by the group. Constructed from stone in the form of an ellipse and covering around 2,400 square metres (26,000ft²) its interior has the form of a labyrinth. At the rear of the temple stands a huge statue of Pai Seta Branca ('Father White Arrow'), a pre-Columbian spirit who allegedly communicated with Tia Neiva in 1957 and became one of her guides, others being Mestre Umahã (Master Umahã), the spirit of a Tibetan monk, Mãe Yara (Mother Yara) and Pai João de Enoque (Father John of Enoch).

The group believes the Jaguars inspired the construction of ancient monuments like Egypt's and Mesoamerica's pyramids, but then somehow went astray. Atoning for the bad karma they believe they have accrued over the millennia, members perform public healing rituals called *trabalhos* (works) at the Templo Mãe nearly 24 hours a day, every day of the year. These are

offered free of charge and attract people struggling with physical or mental health problems, addictions, grief or other problems. A BBC journalist who visited the community in 2012 called it a "refuge for lost souls" that provided food and housing for those unable to afford them.

Poverty prevents many Brazilians from completing their education. Vale do Amanhecer offers its own free teaching system, offering courses on personal development, moral conduct and mediumship. It also has its own legal system, based not on punishment but on restorative justice. According to Vale do Amanhecer doctrine, much human suffering and wrongdoing is the work of spirits called *cobradores* (debt collectors). A *cobrador* is the spirit of a person, typically a family member or friend, who was harmed by a Jaguar in a previous life. When a *cobrador* attaches itself to a living person, its 'debtor', it may cause depression or aggression. The afflicted person then spends a week gathering signatures from fellow group members who wish them positive energy to pay off their spiritual debt. The week-long prison ritual culminates in a courtroom 'trial', conducted in specific costumes, colourful dresses for women, a black shirt with a leather sash for men. Channelled by a medium, the *cobrador* explains the wrongdoing that caused the karmic debt, and after the 'prisoner' has expressed their regret, balance is restored. *theconversation.com*, 29 Apr 2020. **PHOTOS: CARL DE SOUZA/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES**





SIDELINES...

BUFFALO TRAGEDY

A 57-year-old man died and two people were injured after a water buffalo attack in Wales. A man, 19, was critically injured, and a woman, 22, suffered a serious leg injury following the incident in Gwehelog, Monmouthshire. A neighbour said the herd of water buffalo were a familiar sight, often spotted in fields with horses where the owners had been seen stroking them. The water buffalo was later destroyed. *news.sky.com*, 5 May 2020.

EARTH SANDWICH

Two strangers made an 'Earth sandwich' by placing bits of bread at opposite sides of the planet. Student Etienne Naude, 19, put his slice at Bucklands Beach, New Zealand. On the other side of the world was Spanish chef Angel Sierra, 34, who positioned his near Malaga. *Sun, Metro*, 22 Jan 2020.

DREAM ON

Posters bearing the crest of Sheffield City Council and asking people "Would you know if you are dreaming right now?" appeared around Sheffield late last January. The Council denied authorship. <i>31 Jan 2020.

FANTASY ISLAND

Orange County police arrested Richard J McGuire, 42, who had been illegally camping on the abandoned 'Discovery Island' at Florida's Disney World. All Disney parks were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and, besides, 'Discovery Island' has become overgrown and decayed since it closed in 1999. Mr McGuire told authorities he had reached the island to go camping, unaware that it was restricted, describing it as 'a tropical paradise'. *boingboing.net*, 3 May 2020.



MARTIN ROSS

AUCTION ODDITIES | Weird items under the hammer, plus a Templar treasure trove



MYSTERIOUS 'VAMPIRE SLAYING KIT'

A 'vampire slaying kit' (see FT288:32-39; 291:5; 377:23) complete with shark's teeth, crucifixes and a 19th century Bible was put up for sale at a Derbyshire-based auctioneers on 21 July. The equipment's age is unclear, its owner having bought it from a large antiques fair in Newark-on-Trent. The owner, who wished to remain anonymous, said: "I know very little of its history. I have had it in my own collection for three years now," adding "I loved the look of the Gothic box and, when I opened it, I just had to have it."

The would-be vampire-hunter's equipment is housed within a lockable, velvet-covered box, lined with crimson silk. Its lid bears an oval enamel painting depicting the resurrection of Christ, and the box itself contains a carved ivory wolf wearing robes and carrying rosary beads, a percussion cap pocket-sized pistol, a cobalt blue glass phial with white metal lid (contents unknown), three clear and aqua glass bottles, more rosary beads, three crucifixes, two sets of pliers, a pocket knife with mother-of-pearl handle and silver blade, a bottle containing

John Polidori's *The Vampyre* in 1819, Rymer and Prest's penny dreadful *Varney the Vampire* in 1845-47, Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* in 1872, and later, of course, Bram Stoker's 1897 classic *Dracula*.

Hansons auctioneers were hoping for bids of up to £3,000, given that the item is, as the current owner described it, "so interesting – a great conversation piece." In the end, it went to a private UK buyer for £2,500. *hansonsauctioneers.co.uk*, 21 July; *BBC News*, 9 July 2020.

NEWTON'S 'TOAD VOMIT LOZENGES'

Two handwritten pages by Sir Isaac Newton recently put up for sale at auction contained the ground-breaking physicist, astronomer, mathematician and alchemist's very own and highly unorthodox plague remedy. Newton, who formulated the laws of motion and gravity and developed infinitesimal calculus, recommended toad-vomit lozenges as a sure-fire preventative against bubonic plague.

As well as recommending a number of gemstone amulets against the plague, he left detailed instructions on how to make the toad vomit treatment, detailed in the unpublished pages sold by Bonham's auction house for £65,691 in June 2020. Newton's plague manuscript had previously been sold by Sotheby's in 1936, along with a huge selection of his other writings, but these two pages were rediscovered only recently after having been lost for over 70 years.

First, Newton wrote, it is necessary to suspend a toad by its legs in a chimney for three days, until it vomits up "earth with various insects in it". This vomit must be caught on "a dish of yellow wax," he added. After the unfortunate toad dies, its body should be turned into powder, mixed with the vomit and "made into lozenges

The box contains a carved ivory wolf carrying rosary beads

shark's teeth, and a copy of the New Testament with inscriptions from its then owner, an Isabella Swarbrick.

"The task of killing a vampire was extremely serious," said auctioneer Charles Hanson. "Items of religious significance, such as crucifixes and Bibles, were said to repel these beings, hence their strong presence in the kit we have found."

The Bible's date, 1842, gives an indication as to the possible age of the collection. Although belief in vampires dates back centuries, especially (but not exclusively) in Eastern Europe (see FT377:40-45), it only began to appear in UK popular culture at the start of the 19th century with the publication of



SIDELINES...

SHORT MEASURES

Bogota native Edward Nino Hernandez has regained the title of the world’s shortest man alive, according to Guinness World Records. Colombian Hernandez, 34, is 2ft 4.39in (72cm) tall, and stopped growing at age four, when he was diagnosed with severe hypothyroidism. He lost the tile in 2010 to Khagendra Thapa Magar who came in at 2ft 2.41in (67cm), but who died in January 2020. *upi.com, 12 May 2020.*

TWO DEATHS, THREE BURIALS AND FOUR FUMERALS

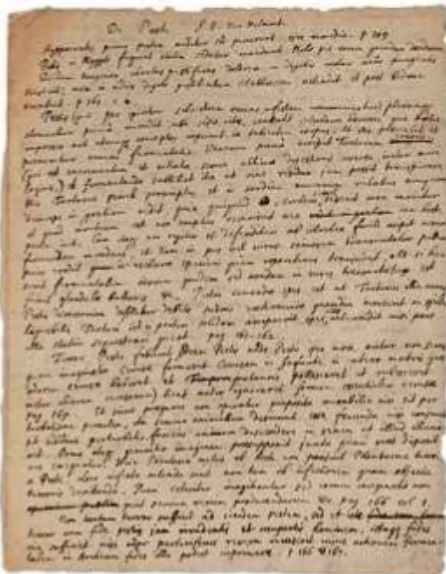
Two grieving families each had to attend two funeral ceremonies after bungling funeral directors mistakenly placed the bodies of octogenarian Paulette and that of 101-year-old Lucienne in each other’s coffins. Both women had died in the same town on the same day. Paulette had intended to be interred in the family vault, but the coffin containing Lucienne was placed there instead. After exhumation, the latter was reburied in her chosen resting place and Paulette’s body, still at the funeral home, was interred in the vault after a second ceremony. *Midi Libre, 12 May 2020.*

BAGPIPES OF THE SOMME

Bagpipes recovered from the body of a Northumberland Fusilier piper who fell on the first day of the Battle of the Somme are to be auctioned, with a guide price of £800. Private William Scott went over the top armed only with his instrument and was killed upon reaching enemy lines. His body was never found, but his pipes were recovered and returned to his parents, later being passed to a collector. *D.Mail, 13 May 2020.*

SIZE ISMT EVERYTHING

A study found that African elephants eating fermenting fallen fruit from the marula tree become drunk because they lack A294 V, a gene mutation allowing alcohol to be processed quickly. The 4in (10cm) pen-tailed tree shrew consumes fermented nectar containing enough alcohol to inebriate a human with no ill-effects. Similarly, leaf-nosed bats display no signs of intoxication whereas elks appear drunk after eating a few rotten apples. *D.Mail, 29 May 2020.*



FACING PAGE: The ‘vampire slaying kit’ up for auction. ABOVE LEFT: One of the handwritten pages by Sir Isaac Newton (below) containing his unorthodox plague remedy. ABOVE RIGHT: Carl Cookson (left) and Hamilton White, Templar treasure hunters.

and worn about the affected area”. These lozenges, Newton stated, would drive “away the contagion” and draw “out the poison”. This amphibian-based plague deterrent was the most efficacious treatment, he claimed, but if someone was unable to obtain a toad, then amulets made of hyacinth, sapphire or amber gemstones could also be used instead.

It’s thought that Newton’s plague notes were written shortly after he returned to Cambridge in 1667, the university having had to close temporarily in 1665 owing to the bubonic plague pandemic sweeping Europe at that time. In 1666, Newton remained under quarantine at the Lincolnshire village of Woolsthorpe-by-Colsterworth, a year later described as his ‘annus mirabilis’, owing to the breakthroughs he made regarding the laws of gravity and motion.

It was not until 1894 that French-Swiss scientist Alexandre Yersin established that the disease was caused by a bacterium, later named *Yersinia pestis* in his honour, a discovery that led to effective antibiotic treatment.

According to Bonham’s experts, the toad vomit nostrum wasn’t Newton’s own entirely original remedy. He had been reading *Tumulus Pestis* (“The Tomb of the Plague”), by Jan

Baptist Van Helmont, a chemist, physiologist and physician from the Spanish Netherlands. “Newton’s notes are not verbatim transcriptions of Van Helmont’s text,” according to Bonham’s, “but rather a synthesis of his central ideas and observations through Newton’s eyes.”

Some of Van Helmont’s observations and theories have stood the test of time; for example, his finding that chemical reactions could produce substances neither solids nor liquids led him to invent the word ‘gas’ (according to Philadelphia’s Science History Institute). *livescience.com, 9 June; edition.cnn.com, 17 June 2020.*

TEMPLAR HOARD REASSEMBLED

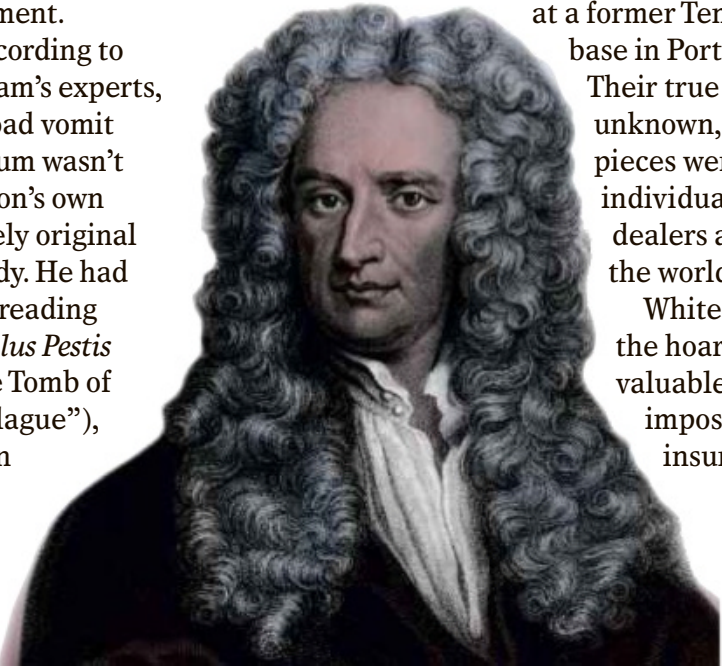
An antiquities hunter and a property millionaire have joined forces to track down and acquire what they believe to be the lost treasure of the Knights Templar. Financed by property magnate Carl Cookson, Hamilton White, 49, has spent 10 years assembling over 100 items that were originally unearthed in the 1960s by treasure hunters at a former Templar base in Portugal. Their true value unknown, the pieces were sold individually to dealers around the world.

White says the hoard is so valuable that it’s impossible to insure. “It’s

hidden at a secure location,” he explained, and when asked the value of the collection during a recent History Channel documentary ‘Lost Relics of The Knights Templar’, suggested £100 million.

The hoard includes a libation cup, a sword adorned with three Templar crosses, a helmet, and an obsidian chalice. White claims the cup and chalice are proof that the Templars conducted “ceremonies”, mentioning rumours of psychoactive substances having been mixed in these vessels. “The chalice is made from volcanic glass,” he said. “Could it represent the Holy Grail?” He further claimed the marble libation cup was adorned with “strange heads”, asking “Could it be that they were worshipping false idols?” He stated, with no apparent evidence, that the sword had belonged to Jacques de Molay, the Templars’ last Grand Master, burned at the stake in 1314 (see FT193:38-41).

Hamilton and Cookson say they have been working to establish the authenticity of their haul, and to chart each item’s provenance. They first met in Monaco; when Cookson mentioned that he owned a former Knights Templar property in Aubeterre, France, it sparked off White’s 10-year quest. “I will continue to learn more as the in-depth science goes on behind the scenes,” he said, adding: “The Templar Hoard will go out on public display once conservation of the items is completed and a suitable venue is found.” *dailyrecord.co.uk, 3 May 2020.*





SIDELINES...

MAMBITES DOG

A man went on the rampage at Liverpool's Lime Street station, flinging an elderly woman's crutches down the stairs while "lashing out at strangers", according to a witness who saw him attack a woman whose dog had barked at him. He then bit the dog. Police arrested a 24-year-old man for affray. *Metro*, 28 Nov 2019.

DEMTAL DISCOVERY

Emily Sullivan, 38, was digging a hole for her children's tree house in her garden at Modbury, Devon, when she found a yellow pot containing five sets of dentures. "I thought we found gold," said the mother of two, "but it turned out to be a pot of false teeth." *Western Daily Press*, 9 July 2019.

DR MONKEY AND MR SNAKE

A Trinidad & Tobago hospital admitted that a monkey had been discovered in an operating theatre, but angrily denied it had been accompanied by a snake. Its statement was issued in response to a report circulating on social media that read: "Monkey and Big Snake was found at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital yesterday". *independent.co.uk*, 26 May 2020.

DOUBLING UP

A Colombian company has launched a new product which can be used both as a hospital bed and a coffin, designed for COVID-19 patients. Owner Rodolfo Gómez plans to donate 10 of his new beds, essentially a cardboard box with metal railings, and sell others to hospitals for \$85 (£70) each. They can hold a weight of 330lb (150kg). "Poor families don't have a way of paying for a coffin," he said. *news.yahoo.com*, 8 May 2020.



MARTIN ROSS

VANISHINGS

Vatican closes case on teenager's mysterious disappearance, plus the case of the missing mum



FILIPPO MONTEFORTE / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Pietro Orlandi, brother of Emanuela Orlandi (below), who disappeared in 1983, stands with supporters behind a banner reading "No state or church can justify criminality. Truth for Emanuela Orlandi" during a sit-in at St Peter's Square in January 2020.

END OF THE LINE FOR ORLANDI INVESTIGATION

The mystery of 15-year-old Emanuela Orlandi's disappearance in June 1983 has horrified and intrigued Italy for decades. Emanuela was the fourth of five children, her father an employee of the Vatican Bank or of the papal household, according to differing reports. The family lived inside Vatican City and the children were free to roam the Vatican gardens.

After Emanuela's disappearance, the Orlandi family received a series of phonecalls claiming she had been kidnapped by a terrorist group demanding the release of Mehmet Ali Agca, the attempted assassin of Pope John Paul II two years before (see FT312:4, 355:22-23). Another theory involved the Banda della Magliana, a Mafia-like organised crime network based in Rome. A former member of the gang suggested that Emanuela's disappearance had been aimed at the Vatican, as part of a Banda della Magliana campaign to force the return of large sums of money it had loaned to the Vatican Bank via Roberto Calvi's Banco Ambrosiano (Sicilian and



Roman mafiosi have been linked to Calvi's death at London's Blackfriars Bridge in 1982; see FT161:24).

In 2001, the parish priest of the Gregory VII Church near the Vatican discovered a human skull in a confessional box. It was of small dimensions, lacking its jaw, and was inside a bag with an image of Padre Pio. It has not been officially identified as Orlandi's skull. The case was reopened in 2012 after an anonymous tip-off that the tomb of gangster Enrico de Pedis, who died in 1990, contained evidence

that would aid the investigation. A former girlfriend of de Pedis claimed that he had admitted having kidnapped Emanuela. Police opened the tomb and took DNA samples, but no further progress was made.

Also in 2012, famous exorcist Gabriele Amorth (see FT313:34, 42) alleged Emanuela had been kidnapped by a member of the Vatican police and abused at sex parties before being murdered. He also claimed that officials of an unnamed foreign embassy had been involved.

In 2019, another anonymous tip to the Orlandi family suggested her body might be buried in the cemetery of the Pontifical Teutonic College inside Vatican City's walls. Two tombs, supposed to contain the remains of Princess Sophie of Hohenlohe-Waldenburg-Bartenstein and Duchess Charlotte Frederica of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, were opened and examined by a forensic anthropologist. However, neither Emanuela's body nor those of the two princesses were found, thus creating a further mystery. Other burial chambers near the cemetery were opened, but tests on thousands of bone fragments



found the remains long predated Emanuela's disappearance, the most recent having been interred about 100 years ago.

As a result of this inconclusive investigation, Vatican prosecutors called for the entire enquiry to be shelved, and in April 2020, the Vatican announced that its tribunal judge had accepted the request. Emanuela's relatives have demanded the Vatican reveal all it knows. In a statement, the Holy See stressed that it had given the family full cooperation, and that the formal closure of the investigation now allows the Orlandis access to the bone fragments to conduct their own tests.

Emanuela's disappearance has been linked with that of Mirella Gregori, also 15, who disappeared from Rome one month before in May 1983. Her case has also been linked with the terrorist group seeking the release of Mehmet Ali Agca, whose autobiography claimed the two girls' disappearances, together with that of Russian journalist Oleg G Bitov, who disappeared from the Venice Film Festival in September the same year, were all linked.

The Vatican itself has also come under suspicion; during Pope John Paul II's visit to a Rome parish in December 1985, Mirella's mother believed she recognised a person among the papal escort, later identified as Raoul Bonarelli, as the man who often came to pick up her daughter at the family house. *irishexaminer.com*, 30 Apr 2020.

THE LADY VANISHES

In June 1997, an Australian schoolteacher, Marion Barter, 51, embarked on a dream year-long holiday in the United Kingdom. Postcards sent from the UK to friends and family had described the "wonderful" time she was having. Calling her daughter Sally from a Tunbridge Wells phone box on 1 August, she spoke of "such a lovely time having morning tea with old ladies"; nothing seemed to be troubling her. But this was the last time that Sally heard from her. Sally was surprised when her mother failed to mark her son Owen's birthday on 18 October, and became fearful for her welfare. She contacted Marion's bank, who informed her that \$5,000 (£2,640) had been withdrawn every day for three weeks (the proceeds of the sale of her house) from banks in Byron Bay, northern New South Wales (NSW), and in Queensland, and that whoever had withdrawn the cash had entered Australia on 2 August, the day after the happy phone call with her daughter, despite Marion making no mention of wishing to return home.

Byron Bay police refused to mount an investigation, saying they had spoken to Marion (or someone they believed to be Marion) on the phone, and that she had told them she did not wish to be found.

Sally was subsequently told by a NSW

detective that her mother had changed her name to Florabella Natalia Marion Remakel two months before she left for the UK, and that a person with a passport bearing that name had entered Australia on 2 August. Sally was mystified, saying her mother was not a "street-smart, savvy woman" and that "for her to change her name is beyond me". She suspected her mother might have fallen in with a dubious character. There were also indications that she was troubled in the year leading up to her disappearance; a school where she had taught fell under the spotlight with allegations of sexual abuse, and while there is absolutely no indication that Marion was a perpetrator, she had at one time been accused of molesting boys by a fellow teacher who was described as "a bully" who had been responsible for the resignations of 11 teachers out of a possible 17. There were also suggestions that Marion was facing problems with a relationship. Married three times, she had always been open about her relationships, but in that final year had become secretive.

Private investigators failed to find any trace of her. It was discovered that the \$20,000 (£10,500) she had transferred to a UK bank to be used during her trip had not been touched. A year before her departure, Sally recalled her mother asking if

she could come to dinner "so she could remember me in my house".

A friend of her mother's remembers something similar: Sally asking the friend to stand under a lamp post, "so I can remember you".

Although NSW police believe Marion is still alive over 20 years later, and that her disappearance was planned and premeditated, no trace of her has surfaced despite periodic checks of health insurance, pension schemes and other resources. Sally remains uncertain whether her mother deliberately chose to start a new life, or whether she was murdered for her money. *Australian Women's Weekly*, June 2019.



INSET: Marion Barter, who disappeared in 1997. ABOVE: The last postcard she sent to her daughter Sally shows a street scene in Alfriston, East Sussex.

SIDELINES...

NO SPIDEY SENSES

Three young Bolivian brothers, aged 12, 10 and eight, were hospitalised after goading a black widow spider into biting them, hoping it would turn them into Spider-Man. The boys had found the venomous arachnid while herding goats, and had prodded it with a stick until it bit each of them in turn. Admitted to hospital with fevers, tremors and muscle pains, they were discharged a week later. *nypost.com*, 25 May 2020.

PENGUINS DROVE US CUCKOO

Scientists on the island of South Georgia investigating the effects of glacial retreat and penguin activity on soil greenhouse gas fluxes became high on nitrous oxide (aka 'laughing gas' or 'hippy crack') generated in copious amounts from penguin guano. "After nosing about in guano for several hours, one goes completely cuckoo," said one researcher. *sciencedirect.com*, 15 May 2020.

WHO'S A CLEVER BOY?

Researchers have learned that parrots, like humans, make decisions based on probabilities. The kea, a large New Zealand parrot, was found to make inferences and predict events based on its knowledge or experiences. In some experiments, the keas outperformed chimpanzees. *D.Telegraph*, 5 Mar 2020.

HEDGE HEIST

A retired couple were shocked to discover their 100ft (30m) hedge had been stolen from their garden during lockdown. Brian and Marilyn Cronk, of Bridge, near Canterbury, Kent, had planted over 80 laurel plants worth £500. The thieves had left 20 plants but returned later to take these too. *D.Express*, 29 Apr 2020.



MARTIN ROSS



SIDELINES...

CAMED HEAT

A Florida woman is facing domestic battery charges after assaulting a man with a can of pasta. The victim was left with a gashed head after the row during which Shadae Miranda, 30, allegedly lashed out with a “15.6oz metal can of Campbell’s SpaghettiOs”. She is currently being held in the can. *D.Mirror, 11 Apr 2020.*

COVID ENCOUNTERS

Belgium’s record number of UFO sightings this year have been attributed to the country’s coronavirus lockdown measures. There were 87 reports in March, and 188 during the first three months of 2020, with over 50 sightings between 28 March and 1 April. Frederick Delaere, coordinator of the Belgian UFO Reporting Centre, suggested clear weather had caused the increase. *D.Telegraph, 3 Apr 2020.*

SHELF HELP

A library cleaner took all the books off the shelves and neatly rearranged them in order of height. Staff discovered the well-meaning gesture after returning to the library in Newmarket, Suffolk, which had been closed for a deep-clean during lockdown. *Sunday, 26 Apr 2020.*

SCRATCHCARD FAIL

Two Mississippi men, Odis Latham, 47, and Russell Sparks, 48, were charged with counterfeiting and conspiracy after they were caught at the state lottery headquarters trying to claim scratchcard lottery winnings with a losing ticket – to which they had glued on that week’s winning numbers. *foxbaltimore.com, 8 Jan 2020.*

GIVEMTHE BOOT

A railway station worker responsible for assessing safety has been sacked for stamping on a colleague’s foot to “test out” his safety boots. The platform manager, who stamped on the man’s foot three times as he dispatched a train from Oprington station, said he had been “silly”. Southeastern Railway fired the employee of 10 years who, it said, had used a “highly questionable” method of shoe testing. *Metro, 20 Apr 2020.*

BOMB ALLEY GATOR | 84-year-old Saturn survived the WWII bombing of Berlin



ABOVE: Damaged buildings at the Berlin Zoo after allied bombing raids. **BOTTOM:** Some of the zoo’s elephants were casualties of the raids. **BELOW:** Saturn, though, somehow survived the rest of the war; here the veteran gator is seen in his Moscow home.

An alligator who survived World War II in Berlin has died in Moscow Zoo. The Mississippi alligator, named Saturn, died of old age. The 84-year-old reptile was presented as a gift to Berlin Zoo in 1936, soon after his birth in the USA. (A number of UK news reports repeated an old urban legend concerning Saturn, describing him as ‘Hitler’s ‘pet alligator’.) Somehow, he survived the heavy Allied bombing of Berlin that began in November 1943; the night of 22-23 November saw extensive damage to western Berlin, including the Tiergarten district where the zoo is located. Thousands of people were killed or injured and many zoo animals also died, with the aquarium taking a direct hit. It was reported that four dead crocodiles were seen in the street outside, flung there by the force of the blast.

It is not known how Saturn survived the next three years in devastated Berlin, in a climate unsuitable for alligators, before being found by British soldiers, who gave him to the Soviet Union in July 1946. He became a popular draw for visitors to Moscow Zoo, where zookeepers say he recognised them and enjoyed being massaged with a brush. If irritated, however, he

could crack steel feeding tongs and bits of concrete with his teeth.

Mississippi alligators usually live to 30-50 years in the wild, so Saturn’s longevity is remarkable – but he may not even have been the world’s oldest alligator;

Belgrade Zoo in Serbia has another male alligator named Muja who is in his 80s and still alive. It is understood that Saturn will now be stuffed and exhibited in Moscow’s biology museum, named after Charles Darwin. *23 May 2020. BBC News.*





WHAT'S UP DOC?

**MON 14 – SUN 20
SEPTEMBER**

**Buy a Jeans for Genes Day limited-
edition Bugs Bunny™ t-shirt at
jeansforgenesday.org/shop**

All profits from the sale of this t-shirt by
Jeans for Genes will help transform the
lives of children with life-altering
genetic disorders

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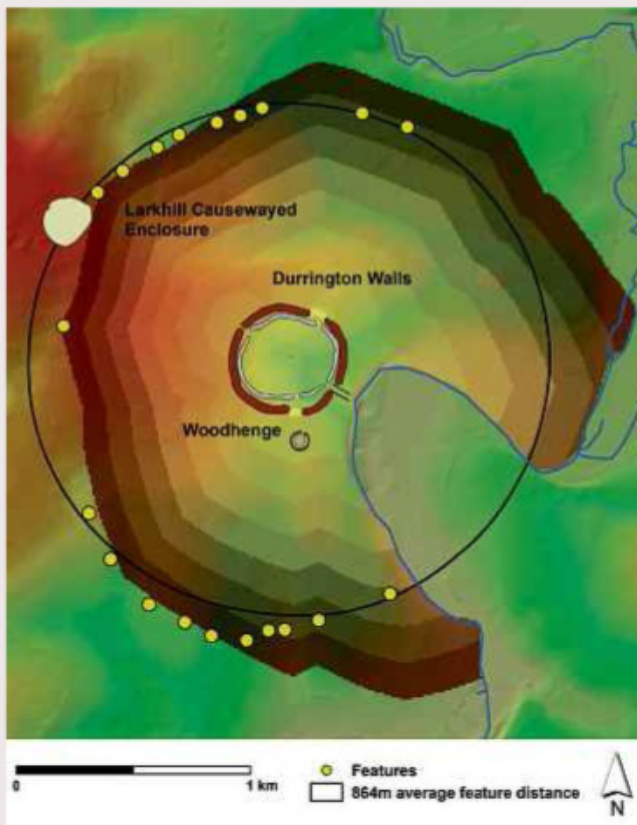
PAUL DEVEREUX digs up the latest discoveries, including a pattern of pits and a formation of pots

THE PITS AND THE CONUNDRUM

A recent major archaeological discovery centres on Neolithic Durrington Walls in Wiltshire. This site is the largest known henge, some 500m (1,640ft) across. (A henge is an enclosure bounded by an earthen bank and internal ditch.) It is 3km (1.8 miles) north-east of Stonehenge, and the River Avon flows past both sites. Since the 1960s, there have been several archaeological field projects investigating the site. The numerous foundations of what would have been timber and plaster houses and two timber circles, one larger than the other, were unearthed, along with extensive signs of feasting. Also, the earliest known metal road in Europe was found leading 100 yards (90m) down to the Avon from the larger timber circle and is aligned closely to the Summer Solstice sunset. Theories have been put forward that the Durrington Walls henge is where the builders of Stonehenge lived, and also that it may have been a place for funeral feasting prior to the deceased being floated down the river to Stonehenge. The new findings around Durrington Walls are something else again, and provide a literally deeper puzzle.

A team of investigators from the universities of St Andrews, Birmingham, Warwick, Bradford, Glasgow and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, using remote sensing technology including ground penetrating radar and direct sampling techniques, have discovered a partial ring of huge pits 2km (1.2 miles) wide encircling the henge. The pits are tentatively dated to the third millennium BC and are of extraordinary dimensions, each measuring over 10m (33ft) in diameter and 5m (16ft) in depth. They have “quite dramatic vertical sides” say the investigators. Core analysis of selected pits indicate that they silted up naturally over time so were seemingly left open after being dug (but there seems to have been further infilling activity later in the Middle Bronze Age). No significant deposits have been found at the bottom of the pits so far examined, other than random shells and a few animal bones, which have allowed for radiocarbon dating.

So far, 20 of these pits have been identified, collectively forming an approximate circle. This is incomplete, because some are lost beneath overlying surface developments limiting further investigation. The investigating team is confident that this pit ring is a huge structure in its own right and unique in the British Isles. In their extensive paper in *Internet Archaeology*,



the investigators summarise the pits as representing “an elaboration” of Durrington Walls henge “at a massive, and unexpected, scale... The data also hint at evidence for the maintenance of this monumental structure into the Middle Bronze Age which, if correct, would have significant implications for our understanding of the history and development of monumental structures across the Stonehenge landscape”.

Digging these features with Stone Age tools must have taken a truly significant effort. So what were they for? While there are pits of differing purposes and ages across numerous landscapes, including at Stonehenge, nothing like this collection of features has been found previously. A few individual prehistoric ones elsewhere are of similar monumental dimensions, which might indicate that there was some sort of bizarre Late Neolithic ritual practice – though the term ‘ritual’ can all too easily be a catch-all phrase meaning ‘purpose unknown’. And what kind of ritual would call for so many massive pits like this ring? (The investigators warn against considering these pits to be ritual shafts.) There have already been suggestions that the pits might have functioned as some sort of boundary or *temenos*, but this does not really make sense: posts or other smaller, simpler features like wattle fences would serve that purpose better and without requiring the huge commitment of labour. In short, this major archaeological discovery opens up a whole new Stone Age conundrum, as if we didn’t have enough. *Internet Archaeology* 55, 2020: Gaffney, V. et al. “A Massive, Late Neolithic Pit Structure

LEFT: Yellow circles represent pits, and black drawn circle indicates median distance from Durrington Walls. BELOW: Nine clay pots arranged in the pattern of the nine stars of The Plough or Big Dipper constellation at the Shuanghuaishu site.

Associated with Durrington Walls Henge” (<https://doi.org/10.11141/ia.55.4>); BBC News, 22 June 2020.

LOST AND FOUND DEPARTMENT

Regular readers of this column will know that from time to time we open up its lost-and-found department to announce unlikely discoveries. This sometimes involves whole ancient cities, and such is the case this time. The prehistoric ruins, with an area of 1.17 million square metres, lie 2km (1.2 miles) south of the Yellow River at Shuanghuaishu in the township of Heluo, Gongyi city, in China’s central Henan province. Ring trenches and city walls are still extant at the site and more than 1,700 tombs have been uncovered, arranged into three blocks. The remnants of three possibly sacrificial platforms have been identified within the residential areas. Among numerous smaller finds, which include ceramics and human skulls, are a set of clay pots arranged in the formation of the stars in The Plough (Big Dipper) constellation – “The Big Dipper is a symbol of political rituals in ancient China,” a site archaeologist explains. Another delightful find is the representation of a silkworm carved out of a boar’s tusk.

The area where the Shuanghuaishu site is located, commonly known as Zhongyuan or the Central Plains, was traditionally recognised as a centre of early-stage Chinese civilisation; it has yielded other ancient ‘lost’ cities going back 5,300 years, and is where at least two whole dynasties later arose. Wang Wei, president of the Chinese Society of Archaeology, comments that “Discoveries in Shuanghuaishu have filled a gap in the research of the origins of Chinese civilisation.” *Archaeology*, 12 May 2020.





CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

250: DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

(As Yankees' baseball legend Yogi Berra famously said)

My début in these pages (**FT129:51**) came in the form of a letter, pointing to a little-known ancient parallel to Fort's stories (*Books*, pp.884-91) of men and women in various cities and countries in the early 20th century being randomly stabbed by hat-pins, sometimes poisoned.

In AD 91, during the reign of Domitian, the Græco-Roman historian Dio Cassius (*History of Rome*, bk57 ch11 para6) thus avers: "Some persons made a business of smearing needles with poison and then pricking with them whomsoever they would. Many persons attacked in this way died without even knowing the cause, but many of the murderers were informed against and punished. And this sort of thing happened not only in Rome, but over virtually the whole world."

No explanation, no names, no context. But this is only a Byzantine epitome made many centuries later. Dio's full text is lacking. He might, or might not, have told us more: who these random killers were? Their motives? How were so many of them detected, and by whom? Were any women involved? Have to ask because Fort declined to believe in the guilt of Mary Maloney, the only jabber arrested (by a policeman on Broadway) because "Women don't do such things. They have their own devilries". Fort subjoined a theory of the time that the culprits were white slavers using drugged needles to abduct young women. This was rejected on the grounds of published statements by physicians that no such drug existed. If not then, probably not in AD 93 either. A lethal one is another matter. The failure of Suetonius, a lover of the lurid, to mention this in his biography of Domitian, gives pause. Commentaries on Dio are spasmodic, nor have I seen any modern classicist discuss the passage.

My letter was intended to point out an overlooked classical antecedent. Now, after a 20-year hiatus, I advance the story. There is, in fact, a second such report, Dio again (bk73 ch14 para4), seemingly from AD 189: "A pestilence broke out, the greatest of which I know anything. About 2,000 people often died in one day at Rome. Many people were also killed in another way, not only in the city but over almost the entire empire by evildoers who smeared little needles with deadly poisons, which for a fee they would inject into others. The same thing happened back

in the reign of Domitian."

The other contemporary Græco-Roman historian, Herodian (bk1 ch12 para2), does not know (or record) this tale. Neither does the *Augustan History*, usually quick to report or invent a bizarre anecdote, in its biography of Commodus. Indeed, it manages altogether to ignore the plague.

CR Whittaker, editor of the Loeb Herodian, dismissed both of Dio's items as "fantastic stories deliberately included to link Commodus with Domitian," the latter by now being a paradigm of evil emperors. In his survey of ancient pandemics (*TLS*, 19 June, p13), subsequent to my recent column (**FT392:18**) on the subject, Harry Sidebottom remarks of the second Dio mention: "Neither the identity nor the motivation of the paymaster is revealed, but a reader might assume that it was the evil emperor Commodus himself."

Not Proven. Not implausible, either. Although impossible to quantify evil, by any measure Commodus ranks among the worst of Roman rulers, albeit Olivier Hekster's *Commodus: An Emperor at the Crossroads* (2002) attempts a degree of whitewashing, while the later Christian poet Dracontius actually deemed him among the best.

I've previously (**FT231:21, 232:21**) catalogued Cæsarian crimes. Relevant here are the Commodian ones of habitual poisonings of individuals and a sadistic sense of humour; for instance, throwing a fully clothed senator into a swimming pool, also compelling him to dance naked before an audience of the imperial harem.

A worry subsists. Was Whittaker right to call Dio's stories 'fantastic'? Here, we face a problem common in classical issues: Doublets. The hatpin items involve Domitian and Commodus. Elsewhere (bk77 ch15 paras2-3), Dio explains that Domitian's murder was occasioned by one of his naked child catamites innocently showing a list of intended executions to his wife. Exactly the same is said of Commodus by Herodian (bk1 ch17 paras3-4), this time the list shown to his mistress Marcia. Suspicious or not?

Commodus is cue briefly to supplement my previous survey of ancient pandemics. He took refuge at Laurentum, an Italian town named for its laurels, thought to provide prophylaxis against infections by blocking the nostrils with their strong aroma. As Galen in various treatises shows, it was anciently realised that

inhalation was the danger. The online *Ancient History Encyclopedia* provides a long list of weird and wonderful cures or protections. Suffice it here to mention pastes compounded of human fæces and bathing in or drinking one's own urine, unappetising but less dangerous than the bleach ingestion advocated by Trump who might have been taken in by the magic amulets profitably flogged by the religious charlatan Alexander of Abonoteichus, derided in Lucian's pamphlet against him (ch36; cf. **FT228:23**). These amulets bore Apollo's name. Lucian drolly remarks they usually had the opposite effect.

Neither the agnostic Thucydides (famously derisive of, for instance, oracles) nor the Epicurean deist Lucretius give the Athenian plague a religious cause (the latter conforms to the tradition of tracing its origin to Egypt).

The fourth-century AD soldier-historian Ammianus Marcellinus (bk23 ch6 paras23-4) recounts that Roman soldiers searching for loot opened up a fissure in Babylonia where ancient magicians had sealed up the plague and released it (precursor of the fugitive virus from a Wuhan lab) with catastrophic consequences.

It's hard to imagine the generally level-headed Ammianus taking such twaddle seriously. It is deadpan reporting in the manner of Herodotus. Also giving the punters what they expected. Divine wrath was the default position (the Byzantine word for earthquake translates as Wrath of God). The so-called Cyprianic Plague (c. AD 249-62), coincident with emperor Decius's persecution, led Christians and pagans to blame each other's deities: a theological stand-off.

Pretty well all pandemics down to now have suddenly vanished, without any help from vaccines. Trump and others seem to assume the same with our pestilence. The Western Empire outlasted the Cyprianic one by a century and more, the Eastern (Byzantine) one by a good millennium. As Harry Sidebottom concludes: "Most scholars point out, optimistically, that plague did not bring about the fall of Rome." So perhaps we may hope to survive the coronavirus?

"A bubonic crawl – lumps fall off and leave skeletons. There would be a sight like this, if a plague could hypnotize a nation, and eat, to their bones, rigid crowds." – Fort, *Books*, p591.



Going round in circles

DAVID HAMBLING reports on a mysterious outbreak of GPS ‘spoofing’ with worrying implications

Ships around the world are reporting false locations, seeming to circle Point Reyes near San Francisco when they are actually thousands of miles away. Nobody knows exactly what is happening, how or why. The evidence points to the spread of a new technology that manipulates satellite navigation signals. Given how much everyone now relies on satnav, this may have serious implications.

The anomalies were picked up by Bjorn Bergman of the environmental non-profits SkyTruth and Global Fishing Watch, who was exploring an historical database of Automatic Identification System (AIS) data provided by commercial satellite networks.

All vessels are legally required to carry an AIS transmitter to signal their identity and location, helping ships to avoid each other at night or in poor visibility. Bergman’s interest was in illegal fishing, so he was looking for vessels entering areas where fishing is prohibited, or ships turning off their AIS. What he found was much stranger. Ships appeared to teleport, moving thousands of miles instantaneously.

Vessels affected include a livestock carrier, *Suha Queen II*, as it approached Libya, and cargo ship *Haj Sayed I* transiting from the Suez Canal. Most incidents just lasted a few hours, but *The Princess Janice*, carrying workers out to Nigerian offshore oil installations, was affected for two weeks, seemingly spending most of the time at Point Reyes before veering off to Utah, with occasional excursions back to a Nigerian oil terminal. Others involved include a pilot vessel off Chile and a Norwegian tug, plus a Russian vessel in the Sea of Azov.

Bergman could tell that the vessels were not actually off California from the locations of the receiver. For example, in the case of the Nigerian vessel, the satellite involved only covers West Africa, so the *Princess Janice* must have been in that region all the time, but transmitting a false location. California was the most common destination, but in some cases ships were apparently displaced to Madrid or Hong Kong. The vessels always seemed to be circling a particular point, sailing at exactly 20 knots in either a clockwise or anticlockwise direction.

This is not the first known instance of GPS ‘spoofing’ where satellite navigation systems have been fooled into showing a wrong location. In 2017, 20 ships in the Black Sea reported a position 32km (20 miles) inland at Gelendzhik Airport, believed to be the result of Russian military spoofing. Receivers also misbehave in



The vessels always seemed to be circling a particular point, sailing at exactly 20 knots

central Moscow near the Kremlin, instead showing a position at Vnukovo Airport, also 32km away. The Russian spoofing may be a protection against small drones loaded with explosives and used as cruise missiles. Spoofing fools their GPS guidance, and spoofing signals are reported to move around with President Putin.

Bergman picked up an earlier version of circle spoofing in China in 2019. In that case he found not just ships but personal fitness devices using GPS circling particular locations at a distance of a few hundred metres at either 21 or 31 knots. This appeared to happen to any ships approaching Chinese oil installations nearby. But the latest instance is far more dramatic, transporting ships across entire oceans from many scattered locations.

There may be a clue in the choice of a target destination. Port Reyes was formerly an important location for the US Coast Guard and involved in early tests of ship-to-shore radio communications.

Previously the only easily available way to interfere with GPS was jamming. The signal from the orbiting NavStar satellites is very weak, equal to a car headlight 12,000 miles (19,300km) away. It can be drowned out by a weak signal no more powerful than a mobile phone nearby. You can get ‘personal privacy devices’ to jam GPS on the Internet for about \$20. These are illegal to use, but not to own, in the UK. Truck drivers typically use them to prevent their

employers tracking their vehicle. Criminals also use GPS jammers to prevent stolen cars being located.

Spoofing is far more sophisticated. Rather than simply overwhelming the GPS signal with noise, the transmitter sends a fake signal so the receiver shows a false location. In 2013 Todd Humphreys, associate professor of aerospace engineering at the University of Texas at Austin, showed how a superyacht with state-of-the-art navigation could be lured off-course by a GPS spoofing. At the time, this took considerable expertise and state-of-the-art equipment; Humphreys was simply trying to alert people to what was possible. However, Bergman’s analysis suggests the situation has changed.

“Cheap, off-the shelf spoofers did not exist until now,” says Humphreys. “I think what we’re witnessing here is the emergence of commoditised spoofing: someone has begun selling a low-cost spoofing device for use on ships.”

Dana Goward of the Resilient Navigation and Timing Foundation concurs. “It is pretty clear that the previous incidents were sponsored by governments or large government-backed organisations,” says Goward. “I suspect that government spoofing equipment has recently transitioned to the consumer market and that is why we are seeing these events.”

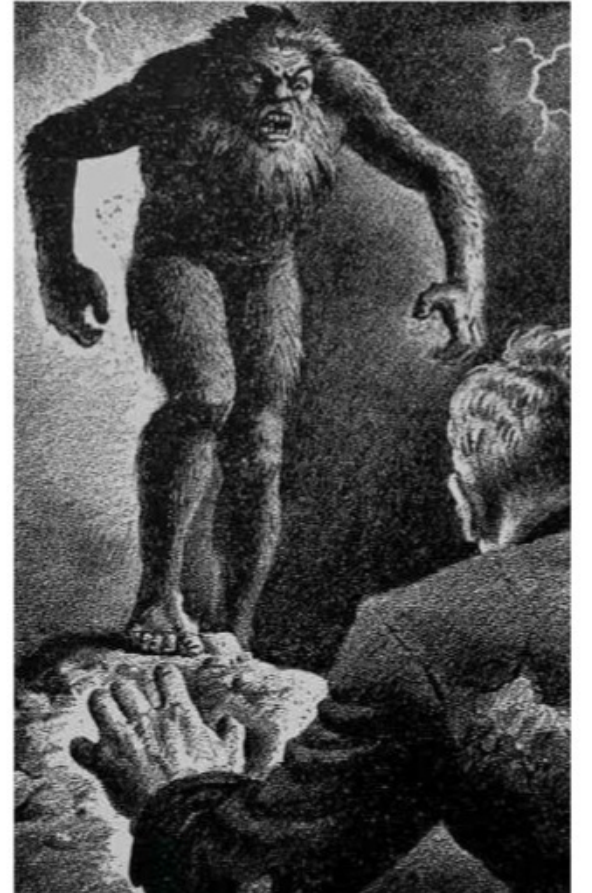
This technology offers plenty of scope for criminals. As in Humphreys’s demonstration, they could send vessels off course to aid hijacking or piracy. Smugglers and illegal fishers can cover their tracks. Nor is it confined to shipping; the same technology could send aircraft or cars off course. Any tampering may accidentally or deliberately lead to serious accidents.

“AIS was designed as a safety-of-life system to help, among other things, manage ship traffic and avoid collisions,” says Goward. “Anything that interferes with it could contribute to groundings, collisions, and other mishaps.”

The fact that each incident only affects one vessel suggests that small, perhaps portable, devices are involved. There is no good theory about why this seemingly random selection of vessels was chosen. What is clear is that some new technology is out there and is being used by unknown persons for unknown purposes. Unless they can be traced, increasing numbers of us may end up running around in virtual circles. The problem is that these days few people use other means of navigation, and if GPS goes haywire we may find ourselves lost without it.



THE BIG GREY MAN | A rediscovered account from 1926 reveals an early encounter with the malevolent monster said to haunt the Cairngorms



ABOVE LEFT: The summit of Ben Macdhui, where Prof J Norman Collie (below) had his encounter in 1891. ABOVE RIGHT: Fortunately, he didn't come face to face with the BGM.

In a recent 'Ghostwatch' column (FT394:18-21), Alan Murdie discussed, among other subjects, mountain climbers' sensing a presence at "high and desolate altitudes", with mountaineer Ralph Izzard's comment that "nine times out of 10 this 'presence' is felt to be malevolent rather than benevolent" (*The Innocents on Everest*, 1954).

A well-known example of such a malevolent presence specific to one mountain is the *Am Fear Liath Mòr* (Big Grey Man) of Ben Macdhui, the highest peak in the Cairngorms and Scotland's second highest peak overall (see FT256:25).

There have been numerous purported encounters with the Big Grey Man, although few have seen it. Those who claim to have done so describe a very tall figure covered with short hair, in one case reported as having olive toned skin with long arms and broad shoulders. More commonly, though, the Grey Man is experienced as an unseen presence that induces feelings of unease and sometimes terror. Nearly all accounts report the sound of footsteps crunching on gravel.

The first recorded sighting



He took to his heels and ran blindly among the boulders

of this entity occurred in 1891, but was not made public until 1926. J Norman Collie (1859-1942) was a professor of organic chemistry at University College London between 1896 and 1913 and head of department from

1913 to 1928, a pioneer of X-ray photography and an experienced mountaineer who had climbed all over the world, including a tragic expedition to Nanga Parbat in the Himalayas in 1895. His 1891 experience on Ben Macdhui was reported in the *Daily Mail*, 11 Jan 1926:

"Professor Collie, who has done much exploration and climbing in the Himalayas, Caucasus, Alps, and the Canadian Rockies and has had many adventures while mountaineering, confessed to the members of the Cairngorm

Club, that he had experienced the most intense fear of his lifetime while climbing Ben Macdhui alone 35 years ago. He was returning from the cairn upon the summit in a mist, when he began to think he heard something else besides the noise of his own footsteps. He heard a big crunch, and then another crunch, as if someone was walking after him.

"He listened and heard it again, but could see nothing in the mist. As he walked on and the eerie "crunch, crunch" sounded behind him, he was seized with the most tremendous terror. Why, he did not know, for he did not mind being alone on the hills, but the uncanny something which he sensed, caused fear to seize him. He took to his heels, and ran staggering blindly among the boulders for four or five miles. He had since learned that another climber once saw a man who looked to be almost 10ft (3m) high wandering round the top of the mountain at midnight. A man who lived on the slope of the mountain, then told the stories, replied that 'it would have been the big grey man they had seen'." *UCL Weekly Newsletter* 9, 29 May 2020.

THE C NSPIRASPHERE

Was a series of bizarre price hikes for ordinary cupboards the latest clue to the activities of the international child sex trafficking conspiracy? **NOEL ROONEY** searches his wardrobe for answers.

WAYFAIR ENOUGH

There are a number of notably strange features in the Wayfair conspiracy theory: actual child sex trafficking is not conspicuous among them. For those of you renting from hobbits during lockdown, the US furniture chain Wayfair recently advertised some oddly priced, and unfortunately named, items for sale on its website. Ordinary cupboards were suddenly going (or very probably not going) for around \$14,000; and the names given to the now luxurious items were exotic but clearly human: Yaritza, Alivya, Samiyah.

It took mere minutes before a perspicuous sleuth in the conspiracist undergrowth put two and two together and came up with Pizzagate. The names on the cupboards were the names of missing children (there was indeed some coincidence of names here; but given the terrifyingly large numbers of children who go missing annually, that was inevitable); the heroically inflated prices were evidence that it was actually the missing children who were for sale, hidden, metaphorically or otherwise, in the overpriced furniture. This was yet another instance of the child-molesting cabal that runs the world (on strictly partisan lines, in most renditions; only Democrats eat babies) hiding its cruel proclivities in plain sight.

The digital world's predisposition to jokes, strangeness and glitches only added to the mix. One well-known glitch in pricing software led to personalised pillows appearing on Wayfair's site for \$10,000; the metaphorical aptness wasn't lost on the conspiracists. Entering the stock-keeping unit numbers of Wayfair products into the Russian search engine Yandex brought up images of young women



The names on the cupboards were those of missing children

(it later transpired that more or less any random string of numbers produced the same outcome, but that was clearly another story). Evidence was everywhere.

The story didn't stay confined to the Conspirasphere for long. A few weeks later, Wayfairgate was trending, via Reddit, on Twitter and Tik Tok, and a good number of Instagram influencers had taken up the thread and spread it among their followers. In some respects, this makes sense; influencers are paid to be credulous, and make others credulous, and the issue of child sex trafficking is both highly emotive and deeply mysterious – why do so many young people disappear, and why are efforts to trace them largely unsuccessful? So a story that purports to investigate trafficking, albeit in a wildly speculative way, has a certain mainstream appeal.

At the same time, a whole posse of online commentators stepped up to debunk the theory, castigate its purveyors,

and agonise over the increasing creep of conspiracy theory into the body politic. As the eccentric moral panic of Wayfairgate went viral across social media platforms, a simultaneous wave of moral panic roused the gatekeepers of sanity into action. A race ensued between the righteously misguided and the misguidedly righteous for the ephemeral soul of the Internet; given the average shelf life of a social media meme, the race was bound to be a clumsy sprint.

So what was going on here? A number of recent trends in conspiracy theory and its treatment by the mainstream, and the inevitable tangling of social media strands have, I think, contrived to elevate a lonesome tweet, and a delayed reaction to it on Reddit, into an inadvertent paragon of high digital strangeness.

In recent years, some types of conspiracy theories have developed into a well-regulated game of ideological semiotics. There is always a template to work from: mass shootings are false flags populated by crisis actors; pronouncements by public figures are coded messages to their 'real' followers; certain politicians are behind the abduction of children, and they conduct their heinous activities in public by using a veneer of codes and shibboleths. All the hard-working conspiracist needs to do is identify the next set of signs and filter them through the correcting lens of hyper-awareness. This is less grand narrative conspiracism, and more whack-a-mole reality; every time the evidential hammer comes down on the conspiracy du jour, another potential plot pops up.

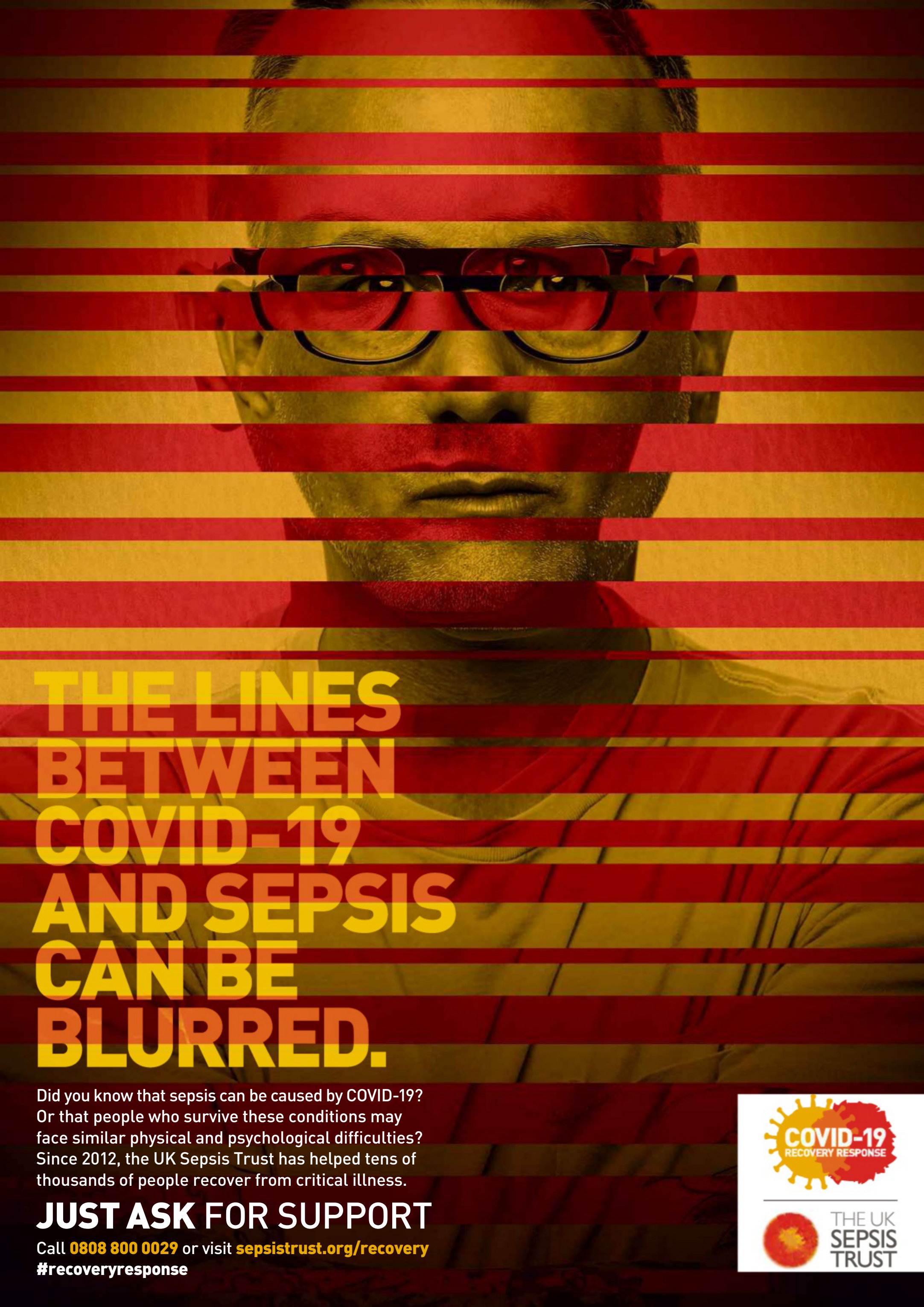
The sheer number of social media platforms, and the huge numbers of people who migrate across them, creates

a situation where nothing stays marginal, and nothing survives in the mainstream for long; this is a recipe for cultural incandescence – reality as a series of spectacular but short-lived phenomena vying for immediate attention. Which makes it all the stranger that mainstream gatekeepers should take these temporary fugues so seriously, and expend so much effort sticking tin foil hats on paper tigers.

Publications across the mainstream media spectrum, from the BBC to BuzzFeed, carried the Wayfairgate story, and their response was consistent to the point of uniform; this was a false conspiracy theory, those nut-jobs at QAnon were responsible, and the folks who had swallowed it were languishing on the evil side of dumb. I was particularly amused that they all felt the need to call Wayfairgate a 'false' conspiracy theory; their worthy attempt at emphatic reinforcement clearly implies there are true conspiracy theories out there too.

It seems that conspiracy theory spotting is becoming almost as popular a participatory sport for the mainstream media as conspiracy spotting is for the denizens of the Conspirasphere; an eldritch hybrid of quaint public service announcement and scary entertainment for the democratically insecure.

SOURCES: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-53416247; www.buzzfeednews.com/article/stephaniemcneal/wayfair-qanon-influencers-instagram; www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/wayfair-child-trafficking-conspiracy-theory-tiktok-1028622/; www.buzzfeednews.com/article/stephaniemcneal/coronavirus-lifestyle-influencers-sharing-conspiracy-qanon?bfsource=relatedmanual



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THE UK
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Glastonbury Town Council's 5G kerfuffle continues, plus more snakes in a pillow case



ABOVE: The £339 '5GBioShield', otherwise known as a USB. Except in Glastonbury.

SIGNALS AND NOISE [FT393:16]



A member of Glastonbury Town Council's 5G Advisory Committee has suggested a £339 '5GBioShield USB Key' may offer protection from the supposedly harmful effects of 5G. Cyber-security experts have determined the device to be nothing more than a standard USB drive. Toby Hall, one of nine members of the public selected to join local councillors on the committee, said his remarks in the council's 5G Advisory Committee Report should not be seen as a recommendation to buy the product, but he confirmed that he uses one and finds it helpful. Mr Hall has no regrets about having bought it, and says that since plugging it in he has felt beneficial effects, including the ability to sleep through the night and to have more dreams. "I also felt a 'calmer' feel to the home," he added. He also suggested the company might be able to develop a system that could offer protection to the whole town of Glastonbury against the effects of radiation from electromagnetic fields.

Among the other eight members of the public chosen to sit on the advisory committee

were retired electronics engineer Derek Cooper, who has worked in the defence and aerospace industries, Carol Roberts, a molecular biologist working in the pharmaceuticals industry, Mark Swann, holder of a physics degree, and David Swain, a businessman and Conservative councillor in a nearby town. All four resigned prior to the report's completion. "I joined the working group in good faith, expecting to take part in a sensible discussion about 5G," says Mr Swann. "Sadly the whole thing turned out to be a clueless pantomime driven by conspiracy theorists and sceptics." Mr Cooper agreed: "I worked out there were only four of us who were neutral. And the others were all absolutely against 5G..."

BioShield Distribution's website describes the 5GBioShield as "the result of the most advanced technology currently available for balancing and prevention of the devastating effects caused by non-natural electric waves, particularly (but not limited to) 5G," made possible via "a uniquely applied process of quantum nano-layer technology, to balance the imbalanced electric oscillations arising from all electric fog induced by all devices such as: laptops, cordless phones, wlan, tablets,

etc," thus bringing "balance into the field at the atomic and cellular level restoring balanced effects to all harmful (ionized and non-ionized) radiation." The device, they claim, "provides protection for your home and family, thanks to the wearable holographic nano-layer catalyser, which can be worn or placed near to a smartphone or any other electrical, radiation or EMF emitting device." The website features several positive testimonials attributed to first-name-only sources, such as: "I received the 5G BioShield USB key and it's beautiful. I am so grateful for this technology. Thank you - Nathalie". It is also endorsed by Dr Ilija Lakicevic and Jacques Bauer. Dr Lakicevic is described as a research professor who has "dedicated his life to discover self and true concepts" and who, after 10 years, "discovered the truth about the human being and true universal concepts and Laws of Creation." Jacques Bauer claims to be a pharmacist specialising in environmental health.

Stephen Knight, operations director for London Trading Standards, said: "We consider it to be a scam." Together with the City of London Police's Action Fraud Squad, London Trading Standards officers are currently seeking a court order to take down the company's website. The 5GBioShield is one of several gadgets and cottage industries that have recently appeared in response to the perceived threat and supposed negative effects of 5G. An examination of the device by Ken Munro and Phil Eveleigh of Pen Test Partners, who specialise in dismantling consumer electronic products to spot security vulnerabilities, found it to be a standard USB 2.0 key, with just 128MB of storage. "So what's different between it and a virtually identical 'crystal' USB key available from various suppliers in Shenzhen, China, for around

£5?" asked Mr Munro. The only difference he found was a circular sticker "remarkably like one available in sheets from stationery suppliers for less than a penny each".

A Companies House search indicates BioShield Distribution's two directors to be Anna Grochowalska and Valerio Laghezza, both of whom appear to have previously been involved in a business called Immortalis, selling a dietary supplement called Klotho Formula, said to use a "proprietary procedure that leads to relativistic time dilation and biological quantum entanglement at the DNA level". When approached by the BBC, Ms Grochowalska rejected the suggestion that selling a £5 product for well over £300 was unreasonable. "In regard to the costs analysis your research has produced, I believe that the lack of in-depth information will not drive you to the exact computation of our expenses and production costs, including the cost of IP, and so on," she said. The BioShield Distribution website currently offers a single 5GBioShield USB key for £339.60, or a packet of three for the special rate of £958.80. *metro.co.uk*, 20 May; *BBC News*, 16+28 May 2020.

UNLUCKY PETS [FT390:10]



An RSPCA search for the person or persons who abandoned 29 snakes in a rubbish bin near a Sunderland fire station in February continues, but further investigation has only deepened the mystery. There were no CCTV cameras in the vicinity, and while the RSPCA are pursuing "a couple of leads", the perpetrator's identity is still unknown.

On the eve of Valentine's Day, firefighters discovered a Buzz Lightyear pillowcase containing 13 royal pythons stuffed in a bin behind their building.

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

252: THE BEARER ON DEMAND



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

If you take a five-pound note into the Bank of England, they are obliged to exchange it for five pounds in gold. It says so on the note: “I promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of five pounds.”

The “truth”

I was astonished (and, on behalf of this column, delighted) to hear the other day of a child who had been taught this at school in 2020. I was also told it by my teachers, but, to be fair to them, at that time it had been untrue for a mere 40 years: Britain came off the Gold Standard in 1931. Since then, a pound sterling has not been worth a pound of gold, or a pound of Liquorice Allsorts, or a pound of anything else. The UK’s pound is a ‘fiat currency’ – it’s worth what it’s worth because the government says it is, and because we all choose to believe them. It’s not a ‘commodity currency’, tied to the value of a physical substance, such as gold, silver, seashells or salt. So the BoE won’t swap your banknotes for gold; “I promise to pay” is just a leftover, a tradition. However, there is a mirror-myth accompanying this one, which is the belief that the Bank will send you on your way empty-handed. The fact is that they *will* exchange Bank of England notes on demand... “for other Bank of England notes”.

Disclaimer

Please write in to correct any errors; we promise to thank the bearer on demand.

Sources

www.bankofengland.co.uk/freedom-of-information/2016/25-february-2016; www.bankofengland.co.uk/knowledgebank/what-is-money; www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/09/gold-standard.asp.

Mythchaser

A reader named James was advised by his wife to revivify limp herbs by standing them in lemonade “because the bubbles help the plant absorb the water”. This led him, and then me, to think of all the additives that are supposed to benefit cut flowers: sugar, aspirin, bleach, copper coins... Do any of them have the blessing of the lab?



The snakes, between two and four feet long (0.6-1.2m), were taken to a specialist holding centre the following day by RSPCA inspector Trevor Walker. They were all in good condition except for one, which died. On Valentine’s Day, Mr Walker received a report of another set of snakes found abandoned in exactly the same place. This time, another royal python and 15 corn snakes had been left in two taped and ziplocked pink pillowcases. “It’s really unusual to see this kind of volume of snakes,” he said. “There’ll always be the occasional snake that has escaped his vivarium, and you find him basking in the sun the following day.” Such a large number of snakes suggested the involvement of a pet shop or reptile trader, but Mr Walker is puzzled: “Why would a pet shop abandon these snakes which are quite valuable to them and are a source of money?”

Alec Wood of North East Reptile Rescue pointed out that some of the royal pythons were rare varieties known as ‘morphs’, having unusual patterns or colours, thus increasing their monetary value still further. In addition, keeping such snakes can be expensive, with each individual ideally being housed in a separate vivarium, large enough for the snake to stretch out, well venti-

lated, and with humidity levels carefully controlled.

Specialist snake keepers are equally mystified. The reptile community in the north east is so small that most people know each other. “If somebody was trying to get rid of a collection that big, people would know about it, and there just isn’t anything,” said Mr Wood. “If you talk to people in the reptile community around here... there hasn’t been somebody looking to get rid of a large collection like that recently.” He hypothesises that it wasn’t the owner who got rid of the snakes. Perhaps a domestic break-up, serious illness or death resulted in a friend, partner or relative being left with a large collection of snakes.

Chris Newman of the National Centre for Reptile Welfare agrees that the sudden appearance of these snakes is strange. He pointed out another oddity: “Typically, people who keep corn snakes keep corn snakes, and people who keep royal pythons keep royal pythons.” He suspects foul play – a deliberate attempt to tarnish the reptile community’s reputation. “Reptiles have always attracted lots of negative publicity from animal rights groups,” he said, “and one can’t help thinking that there’s something behind this.” *BBC News, 29 Apr 2020.*



ABOVE: Snakes in a pink pillowcase – but who put them there? And why?

ENEMY ANIMALS

Another 'spy pigeon' falls foul of India's border patrols, while a berserker wombat takes on three generations of Australian women

AGENT PIGEON

A pigeon with a coded ring on its leg was captured by Indian locals near the border of the contested Jammu and Kashmir region. The pink-painted pigeon was caught in a village in the Kathu district after it flew into a resident's home. It was alleged that the bird had flown across the border.

"We don't know where the bird has come from. We have found a ring tagged to its foot on which some numbers are written," an official said. India's Border Security Force passed the pigeon on to the police, who launched an investigation, logging the animal as a 'Pak Suspected Spy' and declaring they would attempt to decipher the message.

"The pigeon, suspected to have been trained in Pakistan for spying, has a ring with alphabets and numbers written on it," a police source told the *Times of India*. "Though birds have no boundaries and many fly across international borders during migration, a coded ring tagged to the captured pigeon's body is a cause for concern as migratory birds don't have such rings."

Subsequently, however, a Pakistani villager named Habibullah urged India's prime minister Narendra Modi to return his pigeon, then being held in a cage. The man, who lives just 4km (2.5 miles) from the border, said he owns a dozen pigeons and had flown them to celebrate the Eid festival. The supposed code found on the captive bird's leg is actually his mobile phone number, he said, telling a Pakistan newspaper that his pigeon was a "symbol of peace" and that India should "refrain from victimising innocent birds." The captive bird was eventually returned to its owner on 28 May "after nothing suspicious was found".

This isn't the first time that a pigeon bearing codes has been captured. Balloons and pigeons carrying confusing messages are a form of "psychological operation" being carried out by Pakistan in villages along the international



ABOVE: Mr Habibullah's pink pigeon (note matching coop) was accused of spying. BELOW: They may look cuddly, but rogue wombats can inflict some nasty injuries.

border in Jammu and Kashmir. In May 2015, a white pigeon was arrested by Indian authorities, apparently having a message written on its feathers in Urdu, Pakistan's national language. The bird was X-rayed and logged as a "suspected spy" by police. And in October 2016, another pigeon was taken into custody after being found with a note threatening the Indian prime minister. In August 2018, a balloon with Pakistan's national flag and 'I love Pakistan' printed on it was found hovering over Moti village near the border. Similarly, in June that year, a pigeon with markings on its body, partly in Urdu, was found in Manwal village, again close to the border. *timesofindia.indiatimes.com*, 25 May; *D.Telegraph*, 26 May; *BBC News*, 27 May; [R], 29 May 2020.

MORTAL WOMBAT

Jeanette Ambrose, 78, has lived at Daybreak Wildlife Sanctuary north of Dubbo, New South Wales, Australia, for 40 years. She was initially pleased to see a wombat on the property, but when it climbed her veranda and tried to break into her house, she realised it was a rogue specimen.

"He looked up at me and just dived to get past me," Jeanette recalled. "I held him for a long time while screaming out to Nazarena, my 11-year-old great-granddaughter, 'not to let him get you', and then he started biting me."

Nazarena ran to get help while the berserk marsupial commenced to chomp at the septuagenarian. "He'd bite pieces of my leg... he was biting me up to my knees." Jeanette's daughter Kim, who had only recently removed a cast from a broken ankle, limped out of her cabin to assist her mother.

"As soon as he saw me he immediately charged, he bowled me over and got the back of my legs," Kim recounted. "I shoved my hand down to protect myself, offering him my hand because I knew he was going to keep gouging. He was near my femoral artery so I had to have the guts to shove my hand down so then he got my finger and bit down until he exposed the bone."

Meanwhile, Kim's daughter Gemma, woken by her mother's screams, rushed out in her pyjamas. "I saw Mum hobbling up and I heard Nan yelling to her to run, then I heard Mum screaming so I cut through the bush and saw Mum on the ground and the wombat on her finger. I picked up a plank of wood and hit him over the back." Describing their assailant as "having a Terminator-type vibe," Gemma said her blows "didn't affect him. He just immediately turned around and bowled me over. I wasn't covered up so he started biting my

thighs and I was just screaming for my life."

She rolled onto her knees trying to get up, but "he bit me on the bum so many times, all around the backs of my legs. I'd crawl along the ground and he just kept chomping again." Kim, angered at the sight of her daughter being mauled, grabbed a shovel. "I hit him with the shovel and he lunged at me and I fell backwards," she said. "After I fell, Mum [Jeanette] came out of nowhere with the shovel and hit him to rescue Gemma."

Kim then remembered having seen wildlife expert, conservationist and television personality Steve Irwin wrestling crocodiles. "All of a sudden, I understood I had to grab him by the ear and head and lie on his back... then I had both ears and Mum had a grip on his head." Together with her husband and a neighbour, Kim sat on the wombat to hold it down, before ending their night of terror by dispatching the crazed beast with an axe. Police and ambulance services arrived to tend to the wounded family, who were just glad that everyone had survived.

Wombat-on-human attacks are not unknown. James Woodford, wombat expert and author of *The Secret Life of Wombats* (2001), recounted several incidents in which fully-grown men were bowled over and bitten by the powerful creatures, which are also strong enough to hoist dingos onto their backs and crush them against the roofs of their burrows. Woodford notes that Australian zoos give wombats the second-highest danger rating, just below lions and bears. *theregister.com*, 8 June; *Dubbo Photo News*, 4-10 June 2020.





KARL SHUKER welcomes a new crocodile to New Guinea and finds an Audubon fake revealed



'NEW' IN NEW GUINEA

The island of New Guinea is divided horizontally by a central ridge of highland mountains, and since its official description and naming in 1928 the New Guinea crocodile *Crocodylus novaeguineae* has been deemed by herpetologists to be represented here by two genetically distinct populations, one in the north and one in the south. However, they are also distinguishable from one another via certain morphological and behavioural differences. During the 1980s, this led University of Florida zoologist Dr Philip Hall to speculate that these populations may constitute two entirely separate species, but he died before any formal scientific study to evaluate his suggestion was conducted. Hall had concentrated his investigations on behavioural differences, but in 2014 Prof. Chris Murray from Southeastern Louisiana University and Dr Caleb McMahan from Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History joined forces to begin examining morphological differences, looking at structural cranial features using geometric morphometrics.

Their lengthy study, featuring 51 different New Guinea crocodile skulls, ultimately confirmed that whereas crocodiles in the north had long narrow skulls, those in the south had shorter broader ones. Eventually, a formal paper was published in which the southern population has been officially described and named by Murray, McMahan, and two colleagues as a valid species in its own right. Honouring the scientist who first focused attention on it, they have christened this 'new' crocodile *C. halli*, Hall's New Guinea crocodile, a fitting tribute. Interestingly, when seeking to observe some living

specimens, Murray and McMahan didn't have to journey to New Guinea – only to Florida's St Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park. Priding itself on possessing specimens of every single crocodilian species known to science (26 at the time), it seemed possible that the Park might own some of the newly exposed species without realising it – and, sure enough, they did. So now the world has 27 crocodilian species, with this latest one hidden in plain sight from scientists for over 40 years. Moreover, genetic comparisons have revealed that the northern New Guinea species is actually more closely related to the Bornean crocodile *C. raninus* than it is to Hall's southern New Guinea species – an unexpected revelation indeed. <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/07/from-new-guinea-to-florida-one-of-these-crocs-is-not-like-the-others/>, 1 July 2020.

WASHINGTON'S EAGLE

John James Audubon is known in wildlife circles not only as an unrivalled painter of North American fauna, most especially its avifauna, but also as an incorrigible trickster, having invented a host of entirely fictitious species, including over 30 mammals, birds, fishes, and invertebrates that he passed off as genuine to unsuspecting fellow naturalists. Moreover, Audubon's own paintings include a number of contentious species that have never been formally confirmed as fakes, but are unrepresented by any physical specimens. These include several species of small songbird and – most controversially of all – a magnificent eagle that Audubon claimed to be a valid, separate species he dubbed Washington's

LEFT: The new New Guinea croc: *Crocodylus halli*. BELOW: Audubon's Washington eagle.

eagle in 1827, the subject of one of his most spectacular paintings (see **FT262:44-46**). Audubon stated that the painting was based on an actual specimen he had procured, but even if it once existed, it no longer does, so there is no record of its presence. Nevertheless, as its huge size and coloration, while differing from any known species, is consistent with various modern-day reports of certain massive yet mysterious eagles sighted across North America, Washington's eagle has long been of interest to cryptozoological researchers. However, it may now be time to add this famous bird to Audubon's infamous list of hoaxes. In a new scientific paper, Matthew R Halley has cast severe doubt on its authenticity. Having trawled extensively through multiple archives and transcripts to check the timelines associated with Audubon's supposed procurement of the specimen and his claims concerning it, and having also compared Audubon's painting with other illustrations from the same period, Halley concludes that Washington's eagle is a hoax, with Audubon's painting the product of plagiarism and invention. bioone.org/journals/bulletin-of-the-british-ornithologists-club/volume-140/issue-2/bboc.v140i2.2020.a3/Audubons-Bird-of-Washington-unravelling-the-fraud-that-launched/10.25226/bboc.v140i2.2020.a3.full, 22 June 2020.





MEDICAL BAG

This issue's curious case histories include organ transplant recipients taking on characteristics of their donors and a fibbing urethral sounder



ABOVE: Rupert Cross (right) and his bone marrow donor Billy Higgins now share a love of adrenalin-inducing theme park rides.

TRANSPLANT TALES

Rupert Cross, 11, always hated roller coasters and other theme park rides, but after receiving a bone marrow transplant from ride-loving Billy Higgins, 30, he has become a convert, now visiting theme parks with his new friend Billy, where they enjoy the Colossus, Stealth and The Swarm attractions. At the age of six, Rupert was struck down by the rare blood disorder myelodysplasia and was in danger of developing leukæmia, but has now made a complete recovery. Doctors, attempting to account for Rupert's unusual change of character, suggested immunity from vaccinations or allergies might have been a factor in his sudden about-face. But more unorthodox explanations have been posited. Cellular memory theory posits the idea that memories and personality traits may be stored in any individual cells or in other organs, not just the brain (see **FT100:12, 159:24, 236:18-19, 348:54-55**). One academic study followed 10 organ transplant recipients, finding there were two to five parallels (including changes in food, music, art, sexual, recreational, and career preferences) with the donor's history per transplant recipient.

A second peer-reviewed study interviewed 47 transplant recipients, of whom six per cent believed their personalities had changed since receiving their new organ. *blogs.unimelb.edu.au*, 15 Oct 2016; *D.Star*, 9+26 Oct 2019.

- Stephanie Morse, 37, had never had any interest in baking until receiving her mother's kidney in a transplant operation. "But immediately after surgery and for weeks after all I wanted to do was make cakes like mum", the mum-of-three from Cwmbran, South Wales, explained. "As soon as I got home from hospital I got the ingredients to make a raspberry cheese cake. I was obsessed." Her mother Wendy, 67, was amused by her daughter's new-found passion, saying: "She's always loved my cakes but didn't fancy baking." *D.Mirror*, 26 Sep 2019.

- A woman who received a donor heart from a soldier who had recently been killed in Iraq says she immediately noticed strange smells and experienced cravings for alcohol. Mother-of-one Sheron Williamson, 50, remembers regaining consciousness, smelling the

aroma of wet woolly socks and having a strong craving for a drink. "Apparently I was screaming that I wanted a beer." A family member eventually brought a can of beer into her ward, but – perhaps because her original personal tastes had had time to reassert themselves – she just spat it out. *D.Star*, 16 Oct 2018.

MEMORY ERASURE

Peking University researchers claim to have erased specific memories from lab rats' brains. The study, published in *Science Advances*, involved the inducement of fear memories in rats, by placing them in a steel chamber where electric shocks were administered. A gene-editing tool called Crispr-SaCas9 was then used to knock out genes in brain circuits that store memories. After this process was completed, the rats displayed no fear when again placed in the same steel chamber. This March, US scientists used the Crispr tool to remove mutations responsible for Leber's congenital amaurosis, a leading cause of blindness in children. The Chinese researchers suggest their memory erasure technique in rats could be used to combat chronic pain, drug addiction and PTSD in humans. But gene editing technology is still in the developmental stage, as is its legal status. In 2019, biophysics researcher Professor He Jiankui was sentenced to three years' imprisonment for creating genetically-edited human babies. He had been using a gene editing tool to give the babies immunity against HIV. *Times*, 28 Mar 2020.

RATHER URETHRA THAN ME

A 30-year-old man from Guwahati, India, inserted a 2ft (61cm) mobile phone charger cable up his penis for sexual gratification, but told

doctors he had swallowed it, prompting them to launch a fruitless search. Only when an X-ray was performed did it become apparent that the wire was situated in the patient's bladder.

Senior consultant surgeon Walliul Islam said: "We could have done away with the surgery if he had told us the truth," describing how he and his colleagues had conducted an endoscopy and an operation, but had found nothing in the man's gastrointestinal tract. Dr Islam said the patient had a habit of inserting cables and "other stuff" into his penis for sexual pleasure. "It's a type of masturbation called urethral sounding," he explained, "which is the insertion of an object or liquid into the urethra."

The man had presented to doctors five days after having inserted the cable. "He repeatedly told us he consumed it through his mouth and we never imagined an adult would lie about such a thing," recalled Dr Islam, who insisted that the patient was of sound mental health. "Instances of men indulging in urethral sounding are known," he continued, "but this person went to an extreme and hence the cable reached his urinary bladder. This is a very rare thing. Surgery was successful and the patient is recovering." Which demonstrates, as a philosophical Dr Islam concluded, that: "Everything is possible on this Earth, indeed!" *mirror.co.uk*, 6 June 2020.

MONGOLIAN BLUE SPOT

A UK doctor once noticed that many Asian babies he saw at his practice bore what appeared to be bruising on their bottoms in the shape of a hand and five fingers. Interpreting this as evidence of child abuse, he called social services – but he was wrong. In Thailand and other parts of Asia, a new-born baby



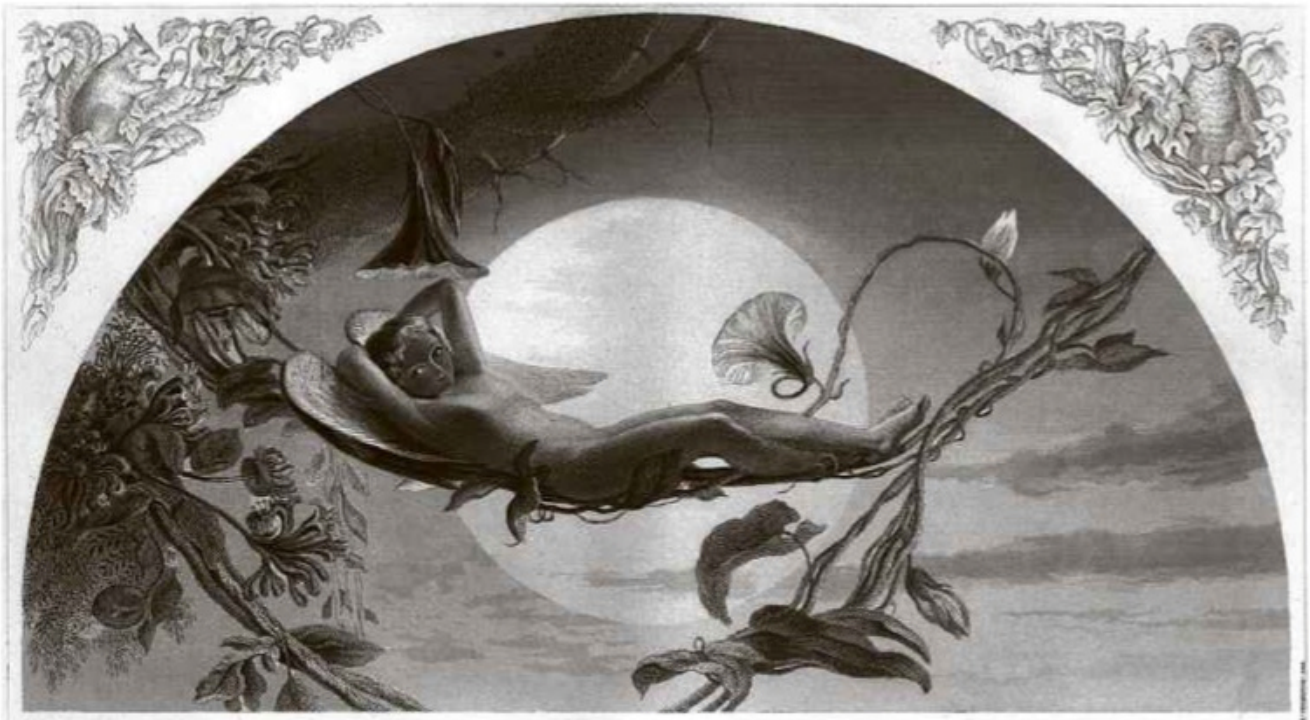
with a 'handprint bruise' is very common. In fact, it is a birthmark, and is known as Mongolian Blue Spot. It is a flat blueish or blueish-grey skin marking, commonly appearing at birth or shortly thereafter. The scientific name is congenital dermal melanocytosis: flat, pigmented lesions with nebulous borders and an irregular shape. Mongolian Blue Spot typically appears at the base of the spine, on the buttocks or the back, but may also appear on the shoulders or elsewhere.

A folkloric account explaining the origin of Mongolian Blue Spot tells of a Mongolian baby called Tanujin, born centuries ago. Newly born, he was unable to breathe. His desperate father held the baby son upside down and smacked him hard on the bottom, causing him to start breathing, but left him with a bruise for the rest of his life. The baby later became Genghis Khan, who ruled a large part of the world, including the area that later became Thailand. It is said that his descendants also bore the hand-shaped bruise, starting with his four sons Ogdai, Jagatai, Juji and Tule.

However, Mongolian Blue Spot is not exclusive to Asian children (80 per cent are thought to have it); surprisingly common, it is present in over 90 per cent of Native Americans and people of African descent, over 70 per cent of Hispanics, and just under 10 per cent of fair-skinned infants (Clinical Pediatric Dermatology, 1993). *pattayamail.com*, 19 Mar 2020.



GZZZ / CREATIVE COMMONS



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

FAMILIAR WATCH

The witchcraft trials, which lasted in England from the late 1500s to the early 1700s, are full of forteana. Take an event at Manningtree, Essex, on the night of 24 March 1645. Eight to 10 individuals – including the notorious witchfinder, Matthew Hopkins – had gathered in the house of a suspected witch, Bess Clarke, on familiar watch.

Witches had small spirit animals (familiars) that needed, from time to time, to suckle blood from the witch: if the familiar appeared before the watchers then this would help to put a noose around Bess's neck. Things were not looking good for Bess on that score, as that evening she had foolishly been reminiscing about sex with the Devil. She then compounded matters by calling on her familiars by smacking her lips.

We have to imagine ourselves in the dark of a 17th-century English cottage, the witnesses all longing but fearing to see the Devil's work made flesh. First Holt slipped out of the shadows, "in the likeness of a Cat". Then came Jermarah "a red or sandie spotted dog, with legs not so long as a finger", "his back as broad as two dogs, or broader, of that bignesse". And so the menagerie continued to appear, one by one... in all, seven or eight familiars strutting their stuff: "One like a Greyhound, with legs as long as a

Stagge; Another like a Ferrit; And one like a Rabbit", then finally a toad.

I think we can take for granted that *something* really happened that night. There are two witness accounts, one by Hopkins and one by his friend Stearne – they match well enough; further sworn accounts had been made by other witnesses in court. But what

did those gathered in the cottage see? The rationalist answer is that Bess was calling out her pets. By this logic, Jermarah was a dog; the rabbit was a rabbit; and so forth... These pets had not, though, been seen on the previous two days. Also, it is difficult to explain how one of Bess's dogs "transformed himself into the shape of a child of foure yeeres old without a head, and gave halfe a dozen turnes about the house, and vanished at the doore".

So what do we have? Group hysteria by candlelight? Carbon monoxide-induced hallucinations? Expectation and suggestion? I have not the slightest idea. But it would be remiss not to report that, on going home, Hopkins's own greyhound chased a small white thing, the size of a kitten, and was badly bitten on the shoulder. The same dog then ran after something feline, three times the size of a cat, and returned "shaking and trembling exceedingly".

Simon Young has recently edited *Sheridan Le Fanu's Scary Fairy Tales: Four Tales of Fairy Horror* (2020)

"ONE LIKE A
GREYHOUND,
WITH LEGS AS
LONG AS A STAG;
ANOTHER LIKE A
FERRIT; AND ONE
LIKE A RABBIT"



Out of the shadows?

The identity of the defence expert responsible for the UK's 'definitive report' on UFOs has been outed by the author of a new book on the Rendlesham Forest incident. **DAVID CLARKE** reports on his research into the elusive figure behind the Condign report.

It is 14 years since I left the Ministry of Defence Main Building in Whitehall holding one of only a handful of hard copies of the 463-page, three-volume report *Unidentified Aerial Phenomena in the UK Air Defence Region*, codenamed 'Condign' by its elusive (and at that point anonymous) author. The penultimate UFO desk officer, Linda Unwin, was, like all MoD staff, subject to the Official Secrets Act. She was responsible for releasing the redacted text to me after I used the Freedom of Information Act to get it from the secret vault of the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS). For years, the MoD had maintained that Linda's department was the focal point for all British government interest. But the report she handed over made it clear this was far from the whole story. Condign was a project funded entirely by the Defence Intelligence branch DI55 that had kept tabs on UFO reports since the mid-1960s when they inherited the task from the former Air Ministry (see **FT226:32-33**).

Files released at The National Archives revealed that DI55's main responsibility was guided missiles and space weapons. UFOs or UAPs (unidentified aerial phenomena) were a spin-off task inherited from the Cold War era. Anything unidentified that entered Earth's atmosphere was of interest to DI55's 'space desk' and they used press reports of foreign UFO sightings to track and locate space debris that had fallen to Earth in places as diverse as Nepal and Tanzania. One of my discoveries, drawing upon declassified intelligence documents and interviews, was that some staff regarded UFO reports as suitable only for the WPB (code for 'waste paper bin'). Perhaps that was why the report that divested them of the task was code-named Condign. The OED defines this word as describing a "fitting and deserved" punishment.

Not all intelligence officers dismissed UFO research as a waste of public money.

The 'secret war' between competing military and scientific factions within the British government could be traced back to the 1950s, when Winston Churchill's cabinet first debated the flying saucer mystery (see **FT372:32-39**). The scientific and technical content of the Condign study betrayed its author as someone educated



at least to PhD level and with some degree of personal interest in the subject, but who did not buy into the extraterrestrial hypothesis that obsessed the media and public during the *X-Files* era. The documents also revealed a deep suspicion of the UFO desk and its links with ufologists. This was evident from the author's closing directives that sought to hide its existence and conclusions from Nick Pope's former branch because of their 'leakiness'. So, who was the author?

In 2009 I appealed to the UK's Information Commissioner against the decision to redact the author's name, plus those of the other intelligence officers involved. Thanks to the involvement of LibDem MP and former Cabinet Minister Norman Baker, questions were raised in the House of Commons. But despite the public interest, the MoD refused to be drawn on the author's identity. By that point, I already knew that former GEC Marconi scientist Ron Haddow was the man who wrote the 'Condign' report, a fact now in the public domain thanks to Nick Redfern's latest book (see **FT394:31** for Jenny Randles's account of Nick's new theory). I hoped that Haddow, with the permission of his former employers,

LEFT: The 'Condign' report', whose author has remained unidentified until now. **BELOW:** Nick Redfern's new book, which spills the beans.

might be allowed to talk publicly about his controversial conclusion that UFOs existed and were an unknown type of natural phenomena linked to ball lightning. But Haddow, now an octogenarian, decided not to go on the record. As he had expressed a wish to maintain "a low profile" I decided it was unethical to name him publicly. I did, however, warn Haddow that others – including several contributors to online UFO discussion groups – would eventually follow the same trail of clues that I had and discover his identity for themselves. By 2018 when the MoD declassified three remaining files covering the project, FT's editor, David Sutton, and journalists at several newspapers also become aware of his identity, but did not feel able to go public with this information.

But as author Nick Redfern says in his new book, *The Rendlesham Forest UFO Conspiracy*, "nothing stays hidden forever". And when the remaining files were released at The National Archives in 2018 they revealed another reason why Haddow remained wary of attention from both ufologists and the media. In 1999, a West Midlands UFO researcher, Irene Bott, phoned the MoD Main Building to report a sighting and asked to be put through to the person responsible for UFOs. Also in the room was Redfern, author of the 1997 book *A Covert Agenda* and at that time one of the MoD's more persistent correspondents. Bott expected the switchboard operator to put her through to desk officer Gaynor South, the only person officially acknowledged by Whitehall as responsible for UFO matters. But a mistake was made and instead her call was patched through to DI55, then based in another central London building. A man answered the phone. He said his name was Ron Haddow and it quickly became apparent that *he* was the person who investigated UFOs for the MoD.

It is clear from the surviving transcript that Haddow was not happy. "Someone has given our [my] name and number," he wrote. "This could raise awkward questions since [the UFO desk] not long ago denied publicly that any work was going on. Ufologists know about DI55 because of the [National



Archives] and subsequent TV leaks... at best the name and telephone number will be throughout the UK ufologists in a matter of days.” And he adds: “At worst the press could get hold of it!... Any disparity in future responses will be seen by the UFO community as a ‘sensitive’ cover-up and only serve (in their eyes) as confirmation.”

Luckily for him, the press at that time were more interested in the views of the self-proclaimed ‘head of the British Government’s UFO project’, Nick Pope, who had recently published a book on alien abductions. I have no doubt this distraction worked well for Haddow and his employers, even though they disapproved of Pope’s public pronouncements. But despite his clear desire to remain in the shadows, Haddow had already discussed his own unconventional theories about UFOs at an event in Israel soon afterwards. And in 2006, after his retirement from MoD, Haddow published an intriguing novel called *No Weapon Forged*, “with a basis of biblical prophecy” that was promoted by its publisher as “a compelling and entertaining read” for fans of Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code*. The blurb describes the book as “a technically, militarily and historically authentic novel about a forthcoming Middle East conflict that is triggered by a dispute over oil. The scenario and weapons in use are frightening – but there is a prophetic twist at the end.”

Redfern considers *No Weapon Forged* as an example of a science fiction novel written by an ex-MoD insider that seeks to interweave a fictional plot with science fact. This literary tradition can be traced back to 1948, when ex-MI5 operative Bernard Newman published *The Flying Saucer*, with a narrative based around crashes of alien spacecraft at remote locations across the world – including the New Mexico desert. In 1985, former MoD civil servant Ralph Noyes produced a novel, *A Secret Property*, that implied the existence of technology “that produces etheric visions of aliens and spaceships” and “can affect the real world in real and hazardous ways”. In his MoD role Noyes helped produce a cover-story to hide the true function of the giant UK-US experimental radar station at Orford Ness, code-named Cobra Mist, near Suffolk’s UFO-haunted Rendlesham Forest. Redfern believes Noyes clearly knew something unusual had happened in the forest, but did not have access to the whole story. In his book, Redfern sets out his theory that the Rendlesham events were created by elements of the US and UK military as part of a series of top-secret experiments involving ball lightning and “the use of sophisticated holograms and hallucinogens” to test the reactions of the military personnel exposed to them. In his view, using a cleverly plotted novel allowed Noyes

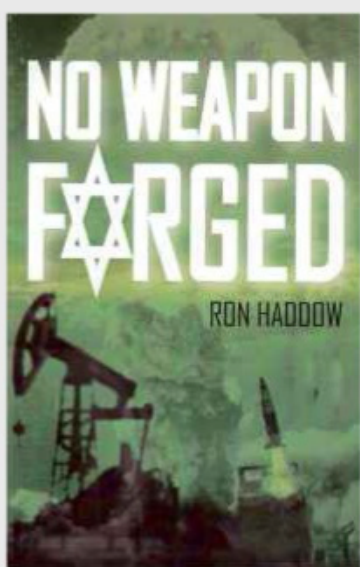


LEFT: Author Nick Redfern and UFO researcher Irene Bott around the time of the fateful phone call to the Ministry of Defence.

The Ministry of Defence attempted to conceal the author’s identity from the media and ufology

to avoid the pitfalls of the Official Secrets Act whilst hinting at yet deeper secrets.

In the absence of Haddow’s own account, what can we learn from the content of *No Weapon Forged*? It opens with a detailed summary of his career in defence intelligence that closely matches the information provided in his report and the remaining DI55 UFO files declassified by the MoD in 2018 (FT368:26-29). Sadly, the book makes no mention of UFOs or UAPs. But it does contain a surprising new fact that may explain the MoD’s reluctance to talk about him. Haddow had “a life changing experience” at a talk on biblical prophecy in 1982 and afterwards joined a Christian Zionist group. In October 2000 he was “one of just two scientists invited to speak by the International Christian Embassy at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem”. Did Haddow link his new-found religious beliefs with his interest in UAPs? An independent first-hand account of the Jerusalem event, posted online by a Canadian delegate, provides a clue. It refers to an unusual talk by “a government spokesman” who claimed that most UFO sightings can be explained by the “poorly



understood phenomena” of plasmas. “Some of these plasmas are man-made by aircraft with radar shield generators,” the speaker said. “These have been in use since WWII (foo fighters) but have only been declassified since the Kosovo war... The rest are tectonically generated (earthquake lights) or generated by meteor events in the upper atmosphere.”

Nick Redfern agrees that Haddow’s religious beliefs must have had some bearing on the MoD’s attempts to conceal his identity from the media and ufology. He

compares Haddow’s interests in End Times prophecies with those held by members of a military think-tank that once existed in the US Department of Defense who were “deep into UFOs but also into Old Testament-type religion”. Mixing UFOs with religion was always going to be controversial, Nick says, especially when “in a roundabout way, it leads to a secret UFO project”. He adds: “I can easily see how and why the MoD would want to keep all of this very low key.” Indeed, in his book, Haddow implies the central character is based loosely upon his own life experiences. In doing so, he reveals his interest in aircraft and guided missiles began in childhood when he heard a German V1 rocket strike on a village near his home in Bedfordshire. He joined the RAF at 18 and in 1954 took part in testing one of the earliest types of airborne radar. Later he took part in Operation Grapple, the British H-bomb test on Christmas Island, and later flew top secret missions in Canberras during the Cold War.

During this time, he must have become aware of the Air Ministry and later MoD’s interest in UFO reports made by test pilots and RAF aircrew. Indeed, one memo refers to having filed his own report with the UFO desk following a sighting during an RAF mission during the 1950s. No details of this incident have ever emerged, but Haddow’s expertise in Electronic Warfare, radar, air defence and guided weapons made him a perfect candidate for the MoD’s real UFO expert. In 1977, he was based at RAF Cranwell working as a specialist in guided weapons and his PhD thesis, completed in 1982, investigated “the probability of detecting and tracking radar targets in clutter at low grazing angles” – a handy technique for someone keen to capture evidence of UFOs on radar. During the 1980s Haddow was called upon to advise US intelligence on aspects of the Pentagon’s ‘Star Wars’ missile programme initiated by President Ronald Reagan. By the 1990s he was Chief Scientist for Systems at GEC-Marconi, the premier electronics company in the UK, now part of BAE Systems, and visiting professor for the Royal Military College of Science.

According to his biography, “for the whole of this period he was also a consultant-analyst to a department in the MoD, travelling extensively for NATO, for industry and for government”. The MoD’s decision to ask him to return, one last time, to write their final report on UFOs must have some significance, even if the Official Secrets Act continues to prevent him from saying anything else. The Condign report was Haddow’s swansong after a lifetime in the world of secret intelligence. His own words reveal that he was aware that it would become a source of speculation and debate for decades to come. But, for now at least, he remains in the shadows.

THE PENSACOLA PASS PLESIOSAUR

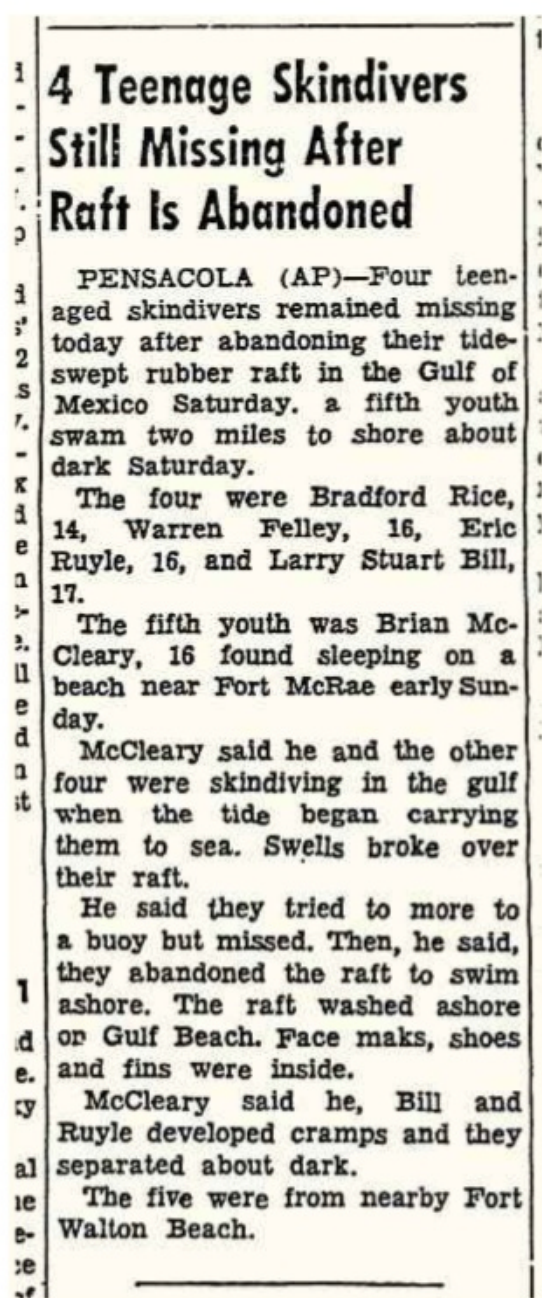
Other than accounts in folklore such as mermaids luring sailors to their doom, or the hapless fisherman killed by Nessie, there are very few marine cryptid encounters that involve fatalities. Florida has the dubious distinction of having two alleged sea serpent sightings that led to tragedy. **DAVID GOUDSWARD** tells the story of one of them.

One of the most notorious sea serpent reports in cryptozoology came to the attention of researchers in 1965. While there is no shortage of sea serpent sightings in Florida, the area around Pensacola had been quiet. Other than Thomas Helm's 1943 possible cryptid pinniped sighting 100 miles away in St Andrew Bay in 1943, there is no record of sightings along that section of coast. So when the May 1965 issue of *Fate* magazine hit the newsstands, cryptozoology researchers were taken by surprise. Author Edward Brian McCleary claimed he was the sole survivor of a sea monster attack in 1962.

In the version McCleary recounted in *Fate*, he was 16 years old when another teen named Eric Ruyle invited him to go skin diving later that Saturday morning, 24 March 1962. McCleary agreed. Rounding out the group was 17-year-old Warren Salley, 14-year-old Larry Bill, and 14-year-old Brad Rice. McCleary admitted he was completely unfamiliar with the dive site – the wreck of the *Massachusetts*, a WWI battleship built in 1893 and scuttled by the Navy in 1921 to be used for target practice. Lying in 25-30ft (7.6-9m) of water, part of the ship is still exposed to this day. No longer of use to the Navy, it had become an artificial reef and the destination of the increasingly popular new hobby of skin diving.

The group's destination was Fort Pickens State Park (now maintained by the National Park Service) at the western tip of Santa Rosa Island. An hour later, they were parked near the fishing pier and preparing to launch a 7ft (2m) Air Force life raft, equipped with a drift anchor and oars. McCleary noted they had climbed to the top of Fort Pickens and could see the wreck, two miles (3.2km) off the coast. He observed the water was cold as they launched the raft.

They took turns paddling. Salley was paddling when Bill noticed the wreck was now on the left, but when they'd started out, it had been on the right. In other



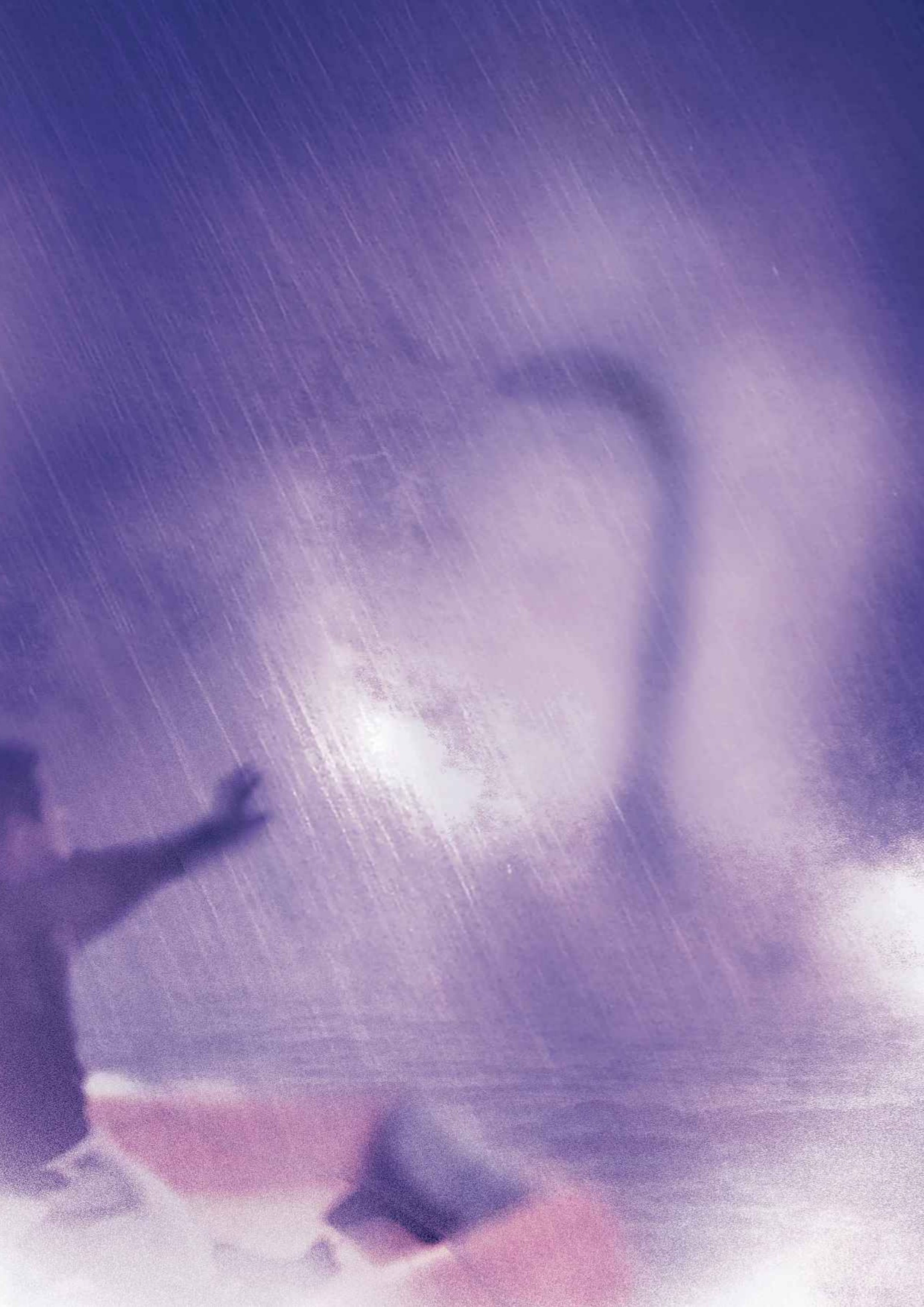
Before McCleary could
toss the anchor, the
waves lifted the buoy
up from its mooring

LEFT: A contemporary newspaper report on the search for the missing teenagers.

words, the current was pushing them to the west. McCleary noticed that whitecaps had formed, and the sky was clouding over as the wind picked up. They decided to turn back, but the wind and waves were pushing them into the Bay channel. Ruyle, McCleary, and Salley jumped into the icy water and began kicking behind the raft while Bill and Rice took the oars. But the tide was just too strong. They climbed back into the raft, shivering from the cold. The waves were so high they had to hold the sides. The sky continued to darken, and they could see small craft heading to port in the distance. They tried to wave down a passing Chris-Craft with no success. Bill began getting hysterical.

McCleary pointed out a buoy about a mile in the distance, and they began paddling toward it. The plan was to hook it with the drag anchor. As they neared it, the waves were threatening to swamp the raft – only the inflated sides kept them afloat. They neared the buoy, but before McCleary could toss the drag anchor, the waves lifted the buoy up from its mooring and a riptide formed beneath. They looked at the 20ft- (6m) tall, red-metal behemoth as McCleary stood up and hurled the anchor, like a lasso, at the buoy. Before the anchor reached the buoy, the raft was caught in the current and dragged straight toward the bottom of the buoy. McCleary yelled for everyone to jump as the buoy came down off the wave, smashing into the raft.

Salley spotted the raft resurfacing. McCleary and Ruyle reached it first and were able to flip it over. They climbed back in as a cold driving rain began. They watched helplessly as the current pushed them past the *Massachusetts*. McCleary noted the wheelhouse sticking out of the water and wind roaring through the windows, making a sound like a siren.





ABOVE: Fort Pickens, at the western tip of the long isthmus of Santa Rosa Island. The wreck of the WWI battleship *Massachusetts* lies two miles off the island, roughly at the top left of the photograph. **BELOW:** The scuttled ship, forming an artificial reef, remains a popular diving site.

THE ENCOUNTER

The five teens lost track of time, but eventually, the rain tapered off to a fine mist and the sea subsided to a dead calm. A thick fog rolled in and McCleary noted it was unnaturally silent; the silence just reemphasised their predicament. Rice began to panic. They tried to calm him down and decided all they could do was sit and wait. The fog limited them to 25ft (7.6m) of visibility. The water, which had been notably cold at the beginning of the trip, was now unusually warm, yet this was only March.

Bill suddenly bolted upright and said he heard a boat. No one else heard anything, but the air suddenly became thick with a sickening smell of dead fish. Forty feet (12m) away, a tremendous splash generated waves that reached the raft and broke over

They heard another splash, and through the fog they could see a shadowy form

the edge. They heard another splash, and through the fog they could see a shadowy form that looked like a telephone pole, 10ft (3m) tall with a bulbous shape on the top. It stood there for a moment, then bent in the middle and dove underwater.

A high-pitched whine broke the silence and the boys panicked. The five of them put on their swim fins and jumped into the water, which was covered in patches of crusty brown slime. McCleary noted a slight current that he hoped would lead to the shore. Instead, they decided to try to reach the *Massachusetts*. Ruyle and McCleary took the lead, with the other three close behind. Whatever they had seen, they could now hear, hissing and splashing behind them. The fog was clearing but the water was getting rougher. It began raining again and the water was getting colder.

McCleary was beginning to get a cramp, so he started swimming with slow, deliberate strokes, more concerned with staying afloat. Ruyle was still nearby, and they would call back to Rice, Salley, and Bill. As they swam toward the wreck, they suddenly heard a scream and Salley yelled that the monster had gotten Rice, but his yells were suddenly cut off by a short cry. Bill caught up with Ruyle and McCleary. The only sounds were the ocean and thunder. McCleary slipped into a fugue – unaware of the ocean depth or what was out there, and imagined sinking peacefully to the bottom. The pain in his legs snapped him back to reality and he realised Bill had vanished. He and Ruyle dove under, but there was no sign of Bill. Ruyle grimaced and also went underwater. He was cramping up badly. McCleary had him wrap his arms around him and began swimming. They struggled through the water for several hours. Night had fallen and the two struggled onward in the dark, waves breaking over their heads.

Just about when McCleary was about to give up, a lightning strike lit up the sky and they saw the silhouette of the *Massachusetts*.



A wave broke over them and the two separated. Another bolt of lightning showed Ruyle ahead of him, swimming toward the ship. The creature surfaced next to Ruyle. McCleary noted the long neck and small eyes. The mouth opened, and it dove on top of Ruyle. McCleary screamed and swam past the ship. He didn't remember swimming the two miles (3.2km) from the wreck to the shore. He slept in an abandoned watchtower until the morning when fishermen spotted him.

THE REPORTS

Bernard Heuvelmans briefly mentioned McCleary's story in the 1968 English version of *In the Wake of Sea Serpents*, unwilling to commit to its authenticity because he had only been made aware of it just before releasing the English edition and was reluctant to speculate. Other authors were less cautious, using the *Fate* version as if it were the only source available.

The *Fate* article embellishes details when compared to the newspapers of the time that anxiously covered the search for the boys and McCleary's rescue. Allowing for exaggeration and hyperbole to make the story more marketable for *Fate*, there are factual issues as well. Charts of the harbour at the time confirm a red buoy nearby, just 200 yards (180m) off the wreck, designated "WR2". But the buoy had a bell and flashing red light, making the location of the wreck reasonably easy to detect in fog, rough seas, or darkness. All other red buoys would be on the starboard side of the channel. The nearest would be the port side markers, which would be black. The nearest starboard (red) buoy without a light or bell would be 1.5 miles (2.4km) away on the far side of the channel, and the port buoy on the opposite

side had a light. In fact, it would be difficult for the raft to become lost unless it was pushed across the channel into the shoals on either side of Pensacola Pass, which would require a direction perpendicular to the current and would make land still visible during the daylight hours.

So what actually happened to Brian McCleary and his friends that day?

A review of the 1962 newspapers confirms that McCleary was involved in a tragic trip into Pensacola Pass where four of his friends disappeared, but there are notable differences between the contemporary newspaper accounts and the version in *Fate*.

Brian McCleary's mother was in Fort Walton Beach Hospital for a series of tests when her son's friend, 16-year-old Eric Ruyle, came to the hospital to ask if Brian could go spearfishing the next day off Fort Pickens with a group of friends. What Ruyle didn't stress was how far off Fort Pickens Ruyle and his friends were planning to go.

Saturday, 24 March 1962, was a perfect day for snorkelling. Clear skies, temperatures in the mid-60s°F, and no rain in the forecast. More enticing to Brian McCleary was their destination; he had only lived in Florida for a year, and while already an avid diver, he had never visited a shipwreck. His mother would later tell the newspaper that he had never been in a boat, let alone a raft. So it appeared that none of the teens had a sense of the potential risks.

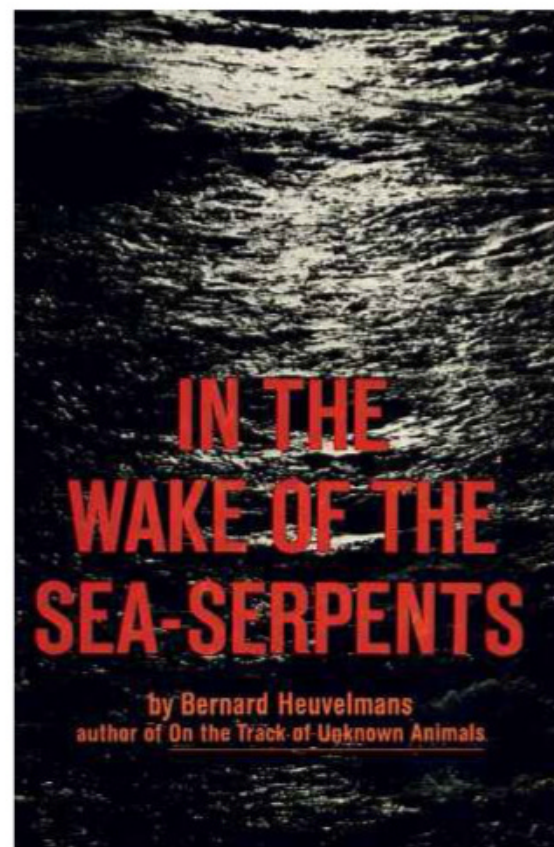
Even today, the *Massachusetts*, although in shallow water, is not considered a dive for novices. The ship was scuttled in a location selected for military target practice, its future popularity among divers not considered. It is in the Pensacola Pass, an outlet that connects Pensacola Bay with the Gulf of Mexico. The location is prone

to strong currents and rough surges. The adventure was doomed almost from the start.

The version of events in local newspapers was based on interviews with McCleary, and the difference between the two versions is striking. In the original newspaper version, the teens had barely paddled a quarter-mile from shore when swells started threatening to swamp the raft. They decided to head back, but discovered they were caught in a strong tide that was pushing them out into the Gulf of Mexico. The raft passed a channel marker buoy that the teens attempted to hook onto with the drag anchor. This was unsuccessful, but it also confirmed they were being pushed out into the open sea. The boys debated swimming to the buoy, but within 15 minutes, it was already a half-mile away. Panicking, they decided to abandon the raft and swim to a buoy.

The plan was to stick together and help each other reach the buoy. The plan fell apart as soon as they hit the water. The current was too strong and the boys were exhausted from attempting to paddle back to safety. Salley and Rice immediately became separated in the swells. Ruyle soon developed muscle cramps. McCleary and Bill attempted to hold Ruyle up, only to have McCleary develop leg cramps as well. McCleary tried to get Ruyle to hold on to him but told him he didn't think they were going to make it. Ruyle told him they were at least going to try. Another swell separated McCleary and Ruyle. In this dinosaur-free version of events, McCleary told searchers he didn't actually see any of the four go down.

McCleary was a strong swimmer, probably the strongest in the group. He



ABOVE: Belgian cryptozoologist Bernard Heuvelmans referred briefly to the Pensacola incident in the 1968 English edition of *In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents*, but was unwilling to commit to its authenticity based solely on the account that had appeared in *Fate*.

kept his head and realised that to battle against the current was futile. Using the buoys as landmarks, he began swimming at an angle, cutting across the current rather than battling it head-on. Using only his arms until his legs began to loosen up, he swam for hours. Feeling the tide changing direction, he allowed it to push him toward land. He reached the shore after dark. He had been in the water for more than five hours. He staggered onto dry land, but couldn't find any buildings. Exhausted, he fell asleep against what he thought was the Coast Guard watchtower on Santa Rosa, seven miles (11km) east of their starting point at Fort Pickens.

McCleary was found at 6.45 the next morning by spear fishermen. He learned that the Coast Guard had spent most of the night searching for them. He had been sleeping against an old gun emplacement at the abandoned Fort McRee on the eastern tip of Perdido Key, almost directly across the Pass from where they had started. The fishermen took him to a nearby trawler that radioed for a Naval Air Station helicopter. The 'copter that took him to the hospital for observation was piloted by Major Ralph Ruyle, Eric Ruyle's father.

The raft had washed up further west on what is now called Perdido Key Beach, roughly where the Beach Colony Resort now stands. It had not capsized, swamped, or been crushed by a buoy. It still contained five spear guns, five face masks, three fins, a knife, five pairs of shoes, five towels, three hats, and a cap.

By Monday, as reports from the search

Shortly after noon, the body of 14-year-old Brad Rice washed ashore near Fort McRae

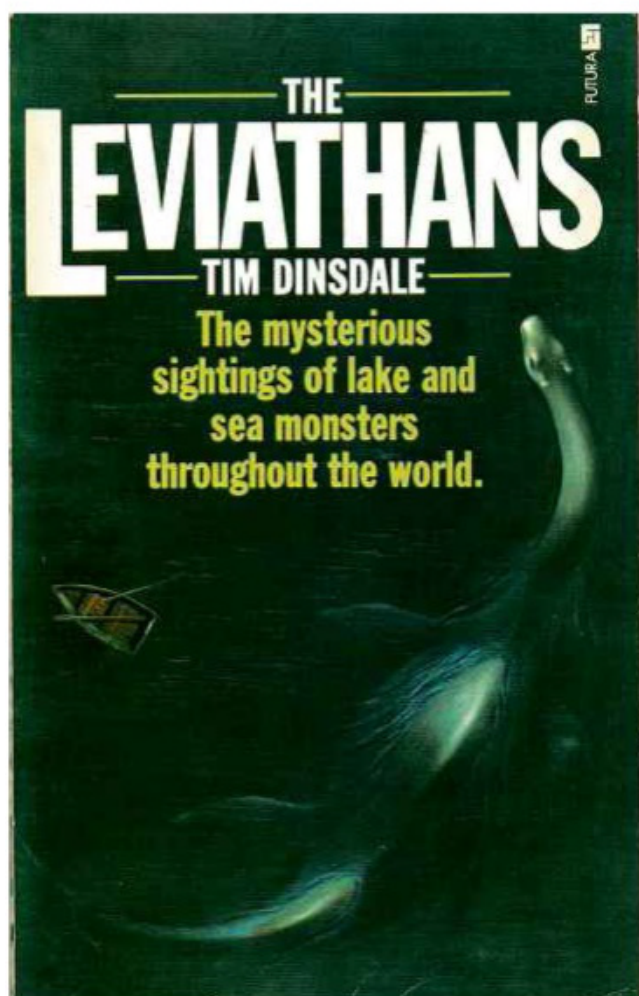


ship began to filter in from the weekend, the press was referring to McCleary as the sole survivor. With McCleary's description, the search area was narrowed. Pensacola Naval Area Station joined Escambia County Search and Rescue as 20 boats dragged the area around the Pass. The search was called off Friday afternoon. Navy aircraft crews were ordered to keep a lookout for bodies, but there was little doubt it would be a recovery, not a rescue.

Frank Neilsen, one of the shore-based searchers, had not given up. The ocean had been particularly rough the night of 30/31 March, and Neilsen hoped perhaps it would be enough to push one or more of the bodies back to shore. He was correct. Shortly after noon, the body of 14-year-old Brad Rice washed ashore near Fort McRae. He was still wearing swim fins.

A memorial service for Eric Ruyle, Warren Salley, and Larry Bill was held that night in a chapel at Eglin Air Force Base. Their remains were never recovered. Brad Rice's funeral took place on 2 April, followed by interment at Fort Walton Beach's Beal Memorial Cemetery.

This version, pieced together from contemporary newspaper reports, paints a significantly different picture to the tale in *Fate*. Where McCleary's 1965 version involves a squall and fog, no 1962 newspaper report mentions such weather conditions, including McCleary's firsthand account. Additionally, the daily weather report for 24 March 1962 from the Sherman Naval Air Station clearly showed the 1965 account in *Fate* is incorrect. At the time



ABOVE LEFT: British cryptozoologist Tim Dinsdale's second book, *The Leviathans*. ABOVE RIGHT: Dinsdale had spent years investigating the Loch Ness Monster and, in search of other cases suggestive of plesiosaur-type monsters, corresponded with McCleary. TOP: The WR2 buoy marking the *Massachusetts* wreck site.

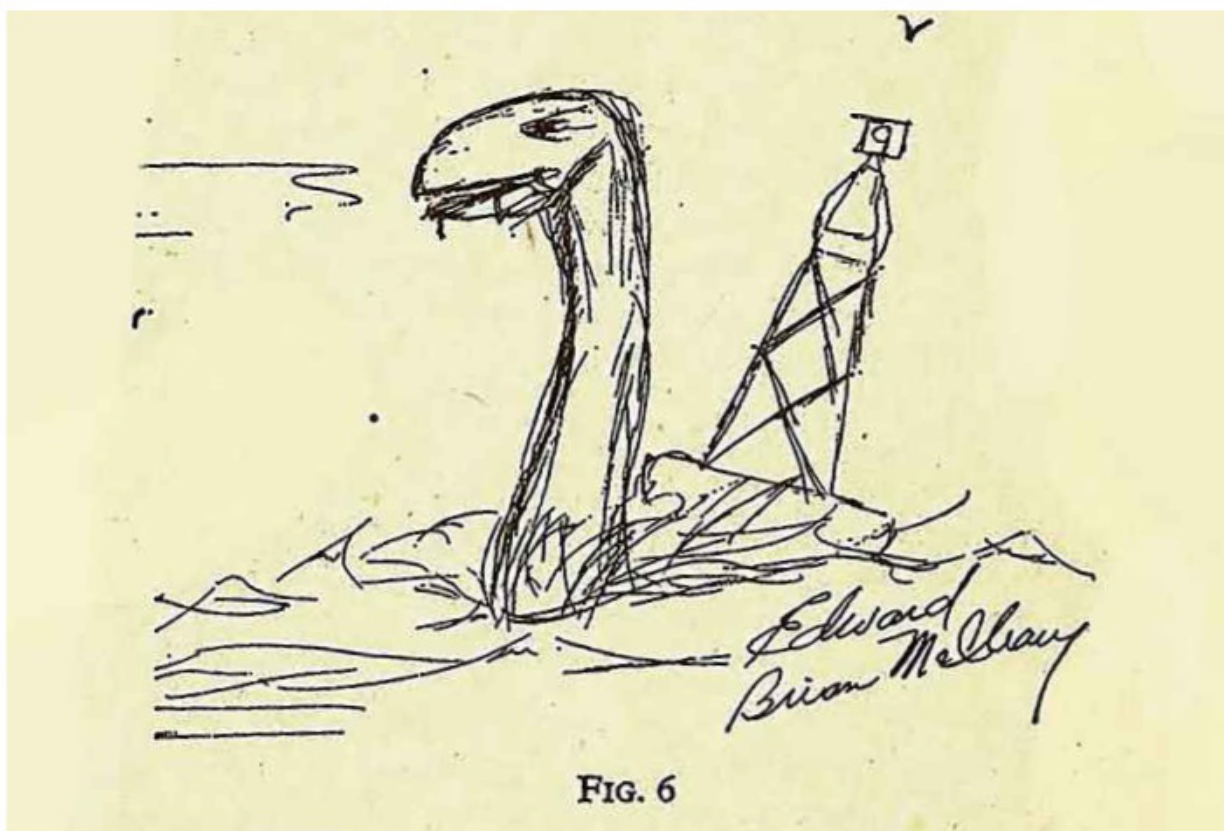
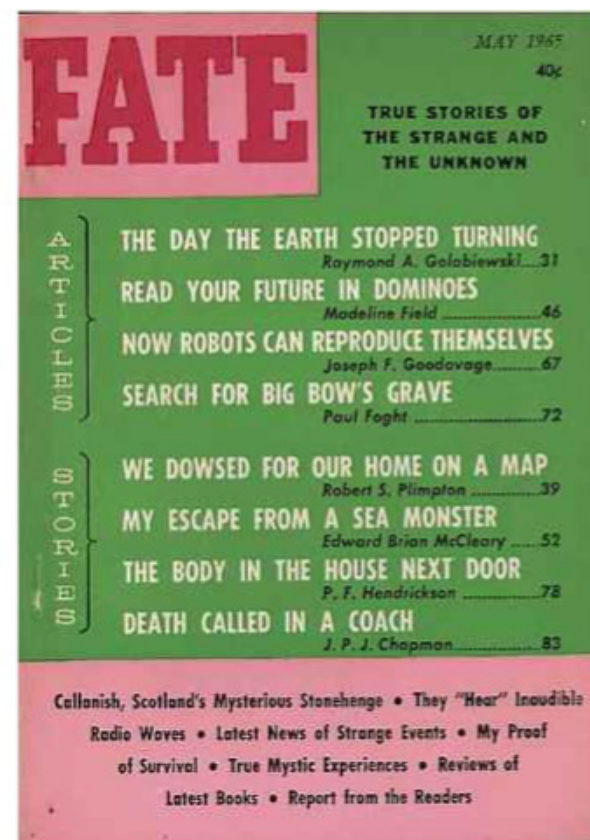


FIG. 6



ABOVE LEFT: McCleary's sketch of the Pensacola monster. ABOVE RIGHT: The May 1965 issue of *Fate* in which McCleary's account first appeared.

the boys launched the raft, the wind speed was 13mph (21km/h) and diminishing. The visibility was five miles (8km). There was no precipitation recorded for the day. The Naval Station reported fog, but based on hourly temperature and dew point records, fog could only develop briefly in the early morning; the sustained 8-12mph (13-19km/h) winds would make it unlikely for any fog to last very long, let alone into the afternoon when the winds increased.

McCleary knew the newspaper reports of the day and the *Fate* article had significant differences, not the least of which was a glaring lack of sea serpents in the original account. His pre-emptive answer was that the director of the Escambia County Search had initially advised him to keep quiet about the sea monster and let the matter fade away as an unfortunate tragedy at sea.

MAKING MONSTERS

The *Fate* article itself was an anomaly. McCleary looked for no publicity before or after this article and avoided interview requests. Among the readers of McCleary's story in *Fate* was cryptozoologist Tim Dinsdale, famous for his 1960 film footage of something in Loch Ness and his 1961 book on the beast, *Loch Ness Monster*. Dinsdale was working on his second book, *The Leviathans*, in which he included reports of other lake and sea monster sightings – a way to bolster the Loch Ness creature's legitimacy by showing it was not an isolated case. Dinsdale was struck by how similar the description of the Pensacola creature was to another case, one he had mentioned in the 1961 book: a 1910 sighting in the Bay of Meil, off the Orkney Islands, by WJ Hutchinson. He wrote to the magazine, and the editors forwarded the letter to McCleary. McCleary wrote back, including additional details, some of which

conflicted with the particulars in *Fate*, let alone the actual event. The neck, brownish-green and smooth, was now 12-ft (3.7m) long, adding 2ft (60cm) to the description in the article. The head, formerly described merely as a bulb, was now like that of a sea turtle, only more elongated and with teeth. The eyes were green with oval pupils, and there may have been a dorsal fin. And now McCleary claimed he stayed most of the night aboard the wreck of the *Massachusetts* and swam to shore in the early morning.

McCleary included a drawing of the monster that showed a long-necked, dinosaurian creature surfacing in front of a channel buoy. The curvature of the neck is reminiscent of the widely reproduced "Surgeon's Photograph" of the Loch Ness monster. More telling is the buoy, showing a lateral marker buoy with a "9" written on it. Nine, being an odd number, would be on the port side of the channel heading to shore, black, not red as described by McCleary. A review of the Pensacola Pass marine charts of the time shows the number 9 buoy was not lit, meaning it was a "can buoy", flat-topped and cylindrical in shape.

The question remains: why are there multiple versions of the story?

The answer may simply be the 2¢ a word that *Fate* paid writers. McCleary had gone on with his life. He graduated high school in June 1963 and attended a local Junior College before transferring to Louisiana State University for the Fall semester of 1964. He met a local girl, a sophomore named Paula. By August 1965, they were engaged, and were married on Labor Day weekend. By the time he was engaged, McCleary's story had run in *Fate*. The \$40 (more than \$320 in 2019 money) would have proven helpful for newlyweds setting up an off-campus home.

McCleary found work and attended LSU

part-time while his wife continued full-time (underwritten in part by legacy scholarships provided to alumni children). She graduated in May 1966. McCleary graduated in 1968, and the couple moved to Connecticut so he could start a career, somewhat ironically, as a life insurance claims adjuster. They moved with some frequency. He continues to maintain a low profile, unwilling to discuss the matter.

The *Fate* story is essentially a fictionalised version, but four families lost sons that day in 1962. They are painfully aware of how real the tragedy was. A 14-year-old boy is buried in Fort Walton Beach, and three sets of parents did not even get that much closure. There is no need for a sea monster to make it worse.

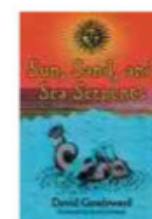
SOURCES

Tim Dinsdale, *The Leviathans*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.

Bernard Heuvelmans, Rupert Hart Davies, 1968.

Edward Brian McCleary, "My Escape from a Sea Monster." *Fate* 18, no. 5, May 1965.

Pensacola Journal, 25+26+27+28+29+30 Mar, 1 Apr 1962; *Pensacola News*, 27+29+30 Mar 1962; *Playground News* (Fort Walton Beach), 27+30 May 1962.



Adapted and extracted from *Sun, Sand and Sea Serpents* by David Goudswad, published by Anomalist Books (www.anomalistbooks.com), RRP \$16.96/£12.99

◆ DAVID GOUDSWAD has written books on topics ranging from HP Lovecraft's travels to ancient stone ruins in New England, as well as many articles on Florida history. He is a frequent lecturer on historical topics and the craft of writing. He lives in Lake Worth, Florida.

THE HORROR AT CLINTON STREET

HP LOVECRAFT IN BROOKLYN

Why did HP Lovecraft, with his terror of the racially other, marry a Jewish woman and move to the “maze of hybrid squalor” that Brooklyn, with its teeming and varied immigrant population, represented to him? **GARY LACHMAN** explores Lovecraft’s New York sojourn, the break-up of his marriage and the uncomfortable literary products that were the result.

Readers of HP Lovecraft’s disturbing weird fiction are often transported to some dangerous and disconcerting locales. There is, for example, Kadath in the Cold Waste, or the inaccessible Plateau of Leng, and perhaps most troubling – and unpronounceable – sunken R’lyeh, lost beneath the waves of the South Pacific, where sits, brooding and ominous, the unspeakable squid-faced Cthulhu. But in Lovecraft’s own short life – he died of cancer of the intestines in 1937 at the age of 46 – the most terrifying place he ever visited was somewhere altogether more mundane. Its location is well known and it is easily accessible via public transport, unlike most destinations on the Lovecraftian map. And aside from the trouble-makers and riff raff that can be found in any town, its inhabitants are, for the most part, human. I’m referring to the largest borough of New York City, USA: Brooklyn.

For years, among locals, Brooklyn was the butt of many jokes. Its reputation even includes the ignominy of having its baseball team relocate to Los Angeles; who these days remembers the Brooklyn Dodgers? But in recent decades, Brooklyn’s profile has had a facelift. This was due in no small part to the rents in Manhattan skyrocketing to nosebleed heights, pushing out practically everyone who didn’t enjoy a six-figure annual income. Parts of Brooklyn itself began experiencing the same gentrification, which often sent the hip and low-earning across Manhattan and the Hudson to the inhospitable shores of New Jersey, where the present writer grew up. Oddly enough, one patch of Brooklyn that has been so transformed is the neighbourhood where Lovecraft lived for a brief time in the 1920s.

Although his knowledge and appreciation of his fellow writer Franz Kafka – creator of horrors of a different kind – was most likely non-existent, the anxiety and despair that overcame Lovecraft during his time



LEFT: 169 Clinton Street, Brooklyn, where Lovecraft wrote “The Horror at Red Hook” in July 1925.

time, his neck of the Brooklyn woods was particularly full, his call was not of Cthulhu, but something closer to that of Joseph Conrad’s Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*: “The horror, the horror.”

A MARRIAGE OF INCONVENIENCE

Lovecraft landed in Brooklyn, leaving behind his beloved Providence, Rhode Island – a place to which he remained obsessively attached, and where he was born and died (see **FT184:32-40**) – when he married his fellow amateur press fan, the older and more experienced Sonia Greene, an immigrant from Ukraine. In hindsight, it seems obvious that both the marriage and the relocation were doomed from the start. For one thing Sonia, who had already been through one marriage, was a Jew. That the asexual, virginal Lovecraft would even consider marriage was perhaps as anomalous a phenomenon as any appearing in his stories. Eroticism, for him, was of the “lower order of instincts”. But that he would contemplate a union with a member of the Semitic race, let alone go through with it, was, like the plots of his less successful stories, beyond belief. To the occasional reader of Lovecraft’s fiction, his deep racism and antipathy to all non-Nordic peoples may not be apparent; but a look at some of the many letters he wrote – their number far exceeds that of his creative works – makes it glaringly apparent.

I am a great and lifelong fan of Lovecraft and of his fellow *Weird Tales* writer Robert E Howard, creator of Conan the Barbarian, *machismo* incarnate (see **FT296:46-53**). But I must admit that reading their exchange over the finer points of Semitic physiognomy turns my stomach more than last week’s milk. An idea of Lovecraft’s xenophobia – not uncommon among Americans of his time who could trace their roots back to the colonies – comes through in his assessment

The angst that descended on him was existential, not extraterrestrial

in Brooklyn Heights seems, to me at least, to warrant the appellation Kafkaesque. Cthulhu, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlothotep and HPL’s other cosmic creatures are indeed chilling, but the kind of angst that descended on Lovecraft while residing at 169 Clinton Street was of an existential, not extraterrestrial stamp. Terrors from beyond space were mother’s milk for him. But when it came to humans, specifically non-white ones, of which, in Lovecraft’s





LEFT: The “Cyclopean outlines of New York” – Lower Manhattan and the Brooklyn Bridge in the 1920s. **ABOVE:** Lovecraft and Sonia photographed early in their relationship on a New York visit in 1921. **BELOW:** A portrait of Sonia Greene.

of foreigners as “twisted cat-like vermin from the ghetto” and “rat-faced beady-eyed oriental mongrels.”¹ Blacks fared no better, suggesting to HPL a likeness to “greasy chimpanzees.”² Given remarks like these – and they are but a small indication of Lovecraft’s often manic dislike of non-white people – I am surprised that in our hypersensitive times, there have not been calls for his work to be chucked out of bookshops and for him to be given a prominent place among the ranks of those damned as politically incorrect. Perhaps the fact that Lovecraft wrote horror fiction and not something more “serious” has so far saved him from being banned; I only hope that those with the power to do so don’t read this article.

Lovecraft met his future ex-wife in 1921 at an amateur journalism conference in Boston. Described as “tall, strikingly handsome” (“Juno-esque” is the usual adjective) and of a “vigorous personality” (some might also add “pushy”), Sonia Greene was the more eager partner in their brief union. She pursued the withdrawn, introverted HPL with patience and determination, finally bagging him on 3 March 1924 at a ceremony in St Paul’s Chapel at Broadway and Vesey Streets in New York’s Wall Street district. Lovecraft, an atheist, chose the location for historical not religious reasons: the church dated to 1776, a monument to his beloved colonial age, although only just. (Lovecraft himself identified with the redcoats and George III.)

Lovecraft, it must be said, did not cut a dashing figure, and the attraction for Sonia was most likely cerebral and not physical. After their separation, which happened in 1926 and his salvific return to Providence – they were eventually divorced in 1929 – Sonia claimed that Lovecraft was an “adequately excellent lover,” failing to explain how someone can be simultaneously

“It was not like any city on Earth... above purple mists rose spires and pyramids”



“adequate” and “excellent”. Yet one wonders if she was overgenerous in her reminiscences. Once, before they tied the knot, when Sonia kissed Lovecraft, the purveyor of eldritch horrors and cosmic terror first turned beet red and then deathly pale: at 32, he had not been kissed since he was subject to the affectionate pecks of his mother and aunts as a child. If this was adequate material out of which to make an excellent lover, Sonia must have been a miracle worker. She did admit that in their physical relations she was the active participant. That Lovecraft considered “the

mutual love of man and woman” to be an “imaginative experience” in which the loved “bears a certain special relation” to the “aesthetic-emotional life” of the lover, seems to clinch it.³ That the older and more mature Sonia came into Lovecraft’s life shortly after his mother, to whom he was deeply attached, died, suggests that his attraction to her was of a psychological, not a sexual nature.⁴ Sonia herself said that “love” was not a word in his vocabulary.⁵

THE CYCLOPEAN CITY

Sonia lived in Brooklyn, and before their marriage Lovecraft had made the journey from Providence more than once to see her and to visit friends and correspondents who lived in New York. These visits were the occasion for the interminable walks Lovecraft persuaded his acquaintances to accompany him on in his search for vestiges of old New York, and had them pounding Manhattan’s out-of-the-way pavements until the wee hours. Lovecraft first saw New York in April 1922 and his initial response was positive, if not ecstatic. The “Cyclopean outlines of New York” were a “mystical sight in the gold sun of late afternoon; a dream-thing of faint grey...” and “It was not like any city of Earth... above purple mists rose towers, spires, and pyramids which one may dream of in opiate lands beyond the Oxus...” and so on in a rush of hyperbolic delight.⁶ Yet soon enough the skyline that “bloomed flower-like and delicate” and the bridges “up which fairies walk to the sky” would lead to remarks about “the bastard mess of stewing mongrel flesh without intellect” that lived there, and hopes that a “kindly gush of cyanogen could asphyxiate the whole gigantic abortion and... clean out the place.”⁷

In retrospect, it is amazing that as obsessive and habitual a character as Lovecraft could wrench himself out of

Providence, a place with which he identified with a pathological intensity. “I *am* Providence,” he once defiantly announced.⁸ As it was, it was some time before Lovecraft could bring himself to inform his aged aunts, with whom he lived in Providence and who tended to his peculiar needs, about the wedding. In many ways, though, when he and Sonia first set up home in her apartment at 259 Parkside Avenue in Flatbush, it was not so much that Lovecraft had left Providence, but that he had brought a good patch of it with him to Brooklyn.

He had many of the items he had grown up with sent to him, claiming that he “could not live anywhere without my household objects around me,” which included furniture from his childhood.⁹ Throughout his stay, the only newspapers he read with any regularity were Providence ones, also posted from back home. He even sent shoes and other clothing that needed repair back to his aunts to patch up. The cheques he received from *Weird Tales* and other pulp magazines, mostly for ghost-writing lesser authors’ work – among them Harry Houdini – and usually for small amounts – Sonia was the breadwinner – were mailed to his aunts, who cashed them and sent him an allowance; he did not open a bank account while living in New York.¹⁰ He wrote long letters to his aunts each week detailing his daily activities, and in the early days of the marriage – after he had finally confessed to it – he invited them to come and live with him and “the wife”. Sonia, good mate that she was, expressed a similar desire, although beneath her surface compliance one suspects that there was more than a little relief when the aunts declined.

In the first flush of married life, Lovecraft tried to adjust and compromise. An inveterate night owl, he tried to keep decent hours and curtailed the nocturnal excursions he led with his cronies trailing behind,

members of the so-called Kalem Club, and the all-night jawing sessions with them that he had revelled in. He also tried, without luck, to find work, an effort he loathed, although the letters he wrote to prospective employers, self-effacing, hesitant, and orotund, were not ones best suited to land a job.¹¹

One habit, though, he was unable to give up. Along with putting up with his other eccentricities, he asked Sonia that, whenever they had company, to ensure that Aryans were in the majority. When Sonia reminded him that whomever they entertained, there would be at least one Jew in the room, herself, he replied that she was now “Mrs HP Lovecraft of 589 Angell Street, Providence, Rhode Island,” as if with their marriage her ancestry had been wiped clean, as well as their geographical location. Lovecraft soon claimed to be cured of his antipathy to non-Aryans, but Sonia knew better. “Whenever we found ourselves in the racially-mixed crowds which characterised New York,” she later wrote, “Howard would become livid with rage” and “seemed almost to lose his mind.”¹² Not long after, when circumstances led to Sonia leaving Brooklyn, it rather seems that he did.¹³

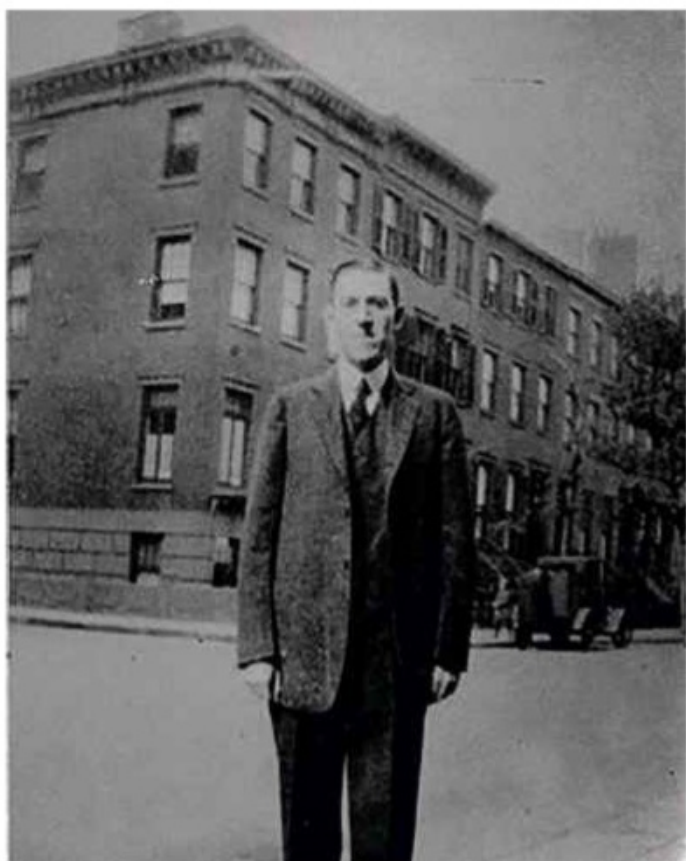
Sonia supported them by working at a milliner’s shop on 57th Street in Manhattan. When that shop didn’t do well, she decided to open one of her own in Brooklyn. This fared even worse. A bank collapse that decimated her savings added to her woes and at one point she was reduced to selling her piano to make ends meet (no loss to Lovecraft, who had no ear for music). Her health suffered too; no doubt financial strain and marriage to an eccentric contributed to her breakdown. Eventually, financial necessity and Lovecraft’s inability to earn – at one point he turned down the editorship of *Weird Tales* – led her to accept a job in a

department store in Cincinnati. Lovecraft refused to follow, saying that the only place he would move to was Providence. Failing this, he’d stay put. He also rejected the idea of keeping her flat and having one of his friends move in. His aunts suggested he get a smaller place. Sonia would put her things in storage or sell them, which she did, and Howard could fill his new digs with the dilapidated furnishings from his childhood, which he clung to tenaciously. He was, he admitted, “unable to take pleasure or interest in anything but a mental recreation of other & better days,” an expression of what some have called his “neophobia,” or fear of the new.¹⁴ Not the best attitude with which to meet a domestic crisis. To get him out of Providence was miracle enough. But to relocate to the Midwest? Impossible! So, at the end of 1924, Sonia headed for Ohio and, at 35, Lovecraft was on his own for the first time in his life.¹⁵

HOME ALONE

The bolt hole he found – or rather his aunts did – was a studio at 169 Clinton Street, now a highly desirable Brooklyn neighbourhood. In 1925, it was rather less so. To call it a slum is perhaps going too far, but it was less salubrious than Parkside Avenue, on the other side of Prospect Park; “seedy” more or less sums up its character. In his new neighbourhood, Lovecraft found that he couldn’t avoid the “mongrel herd” made up of “Mongoloid Jews,” blacks, and the “biologically inferior scum of Southern Europe and Western Asia”, who made it impossible for a “white man” to walk the streets “without shuddering & nausea”.¹⁶

Closest at hand, though, were Syrians, one of whom, he discovered to his dismay, was actually his neighbour. (Nearby Atlantic Avenue is still home to a large Syrian community.) Lovecraft never



ABOVE LEFT: Lovecraft outside 169 Clinton Street in 1925 or 1926. ABOVE RIGHT: The same address, on the corner of Clinton and State Streets, as it looks today.

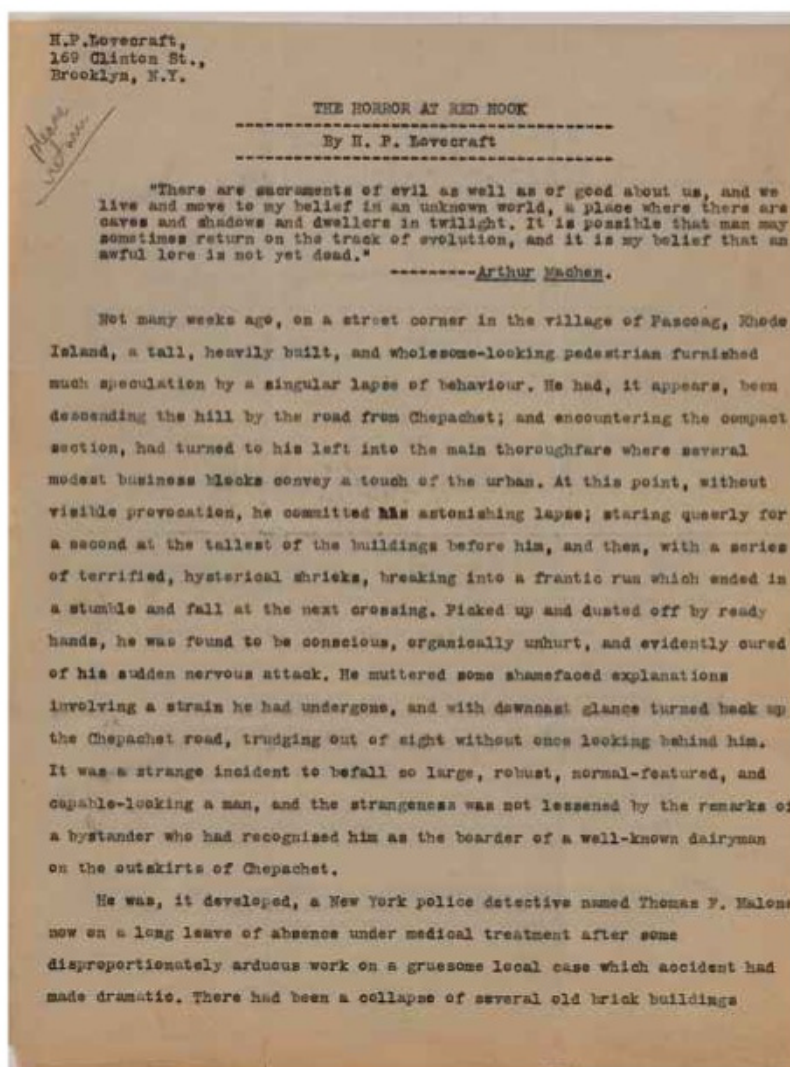
EDEN, JANINE AND JIM / FLICKR

actually saw the man, but fantasised that he “played eldritch and whining monotones on a strange bagpipe” that made him “dream ghoulish and indescribable things of crypts under Bagdad and limitless corridors of Eblis beneath the moon-curse ruins of Istakhar...”¹⁷ (Readers of William Beckford’s Gothic classic *Vathek* will get the allusions.) Never mind that Baghdad isn’t in Syria – Lovecraft admits that he wasn’t interested in the *reality* of his neighbour, whom he never saw, but only heard “loathsomely”. It was his “privilege” to “imagine him in any shape I chose...” This privilege led, we will see, to a paroxysm of disgust, a fictional catharsis that gave shape to his loathing in a tale that put Brooklyn – at least one section of it – on the Lovecraftian map.

Life was hard on Clinton Street. Lovecraft’s studio was home to mice. Even with his Aryan stamina, he could not face their corpses, and he took to throwing out the dead things, traps and all, an extravagance that must have cost him. For the most part, Lovecraft subsisted on bread and baked beans, eaten from the can. He had no heating or stove. The one luxury he allowed himself was books. Sonia sent him care packages and money and his aunts continued his allowance, but poverty was no stranger. At one point he was burgled; among other things, a fine suit Sonia had bought him was taken. Lovecraft biographer ST Joshi’s account of his travails hunting down a new suit that he could afford through New York’s discount clothiers would be funny if it did not make clear his obsessive-compulsive behaviour. On top of all this was the fact that Lovecraft, for all his quirks a man of genius, spent most of his creative energy re-writing stories that, were it not for his part in them, would be rightfully long-forgotten along with much other pulp fiction.

Someone else in this situation might have taken direct action, and Lovecraft himself came close to it, at least in his letters. The “coarse faces and bad manners” of the “mongrel herd” led him to feel like “punching every god damn bastard in sight.”¹⁸ A ride on New York’s public transport made him want to “slaughter a score or two [of Jews] when jammed in a NY subway train.”¹⁹ What Lovecraft might have felt about his remark that Jews would soon be “killed off in some sudden outburst of physical loathing on our” – that is, the Aryans’ – “part,” when it became a reality in Nazi Germany, is unknown. The kindest thing we can say is that in later life, his antipathy to non-whites abated, and his elitism turned into vocal support for President Roosevelt’s New Deal, which included several civil rights initiatives.

But Lovecraft did not, as a lesser character might have done, turn his



LEFT: The first page of Lovecraft’s type-script of “The Horror at Red Hook”, with his Clinton Street address at the top.

BELOW: The story eventually appeared in *Weird Tales* of January 1927.

which he wrote in July 1925. It is not one of his best stories, but it captured his visceral revulsion at the world he inhabited and gave vent to the fantasies it inspired.

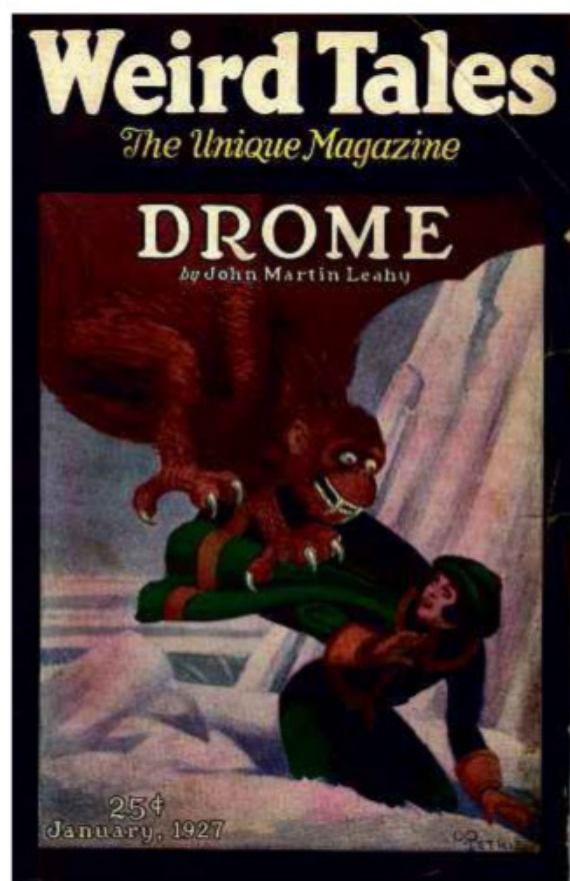
THE HORROR AT RED HOOK

Today the Red Hook section of Brooklyn is a pleasant, quiet, waterfront neighbourhood, made up of clapboard houses, small shops, warehouses, and the trendy atmosphere common to once neglected areas taken over by the young, hip, and successful. It even has an Ikea. In Lovecraft’s day, it was something different: a dark, dangerous part of town, home to many Southern and Eastern European immigrants, who worked the docks fronting New York Bay. For them, it was a part of town they could afford to live in. For Lovecraft, it was “the polyglot abyss of New York’s underworld.”²⁰

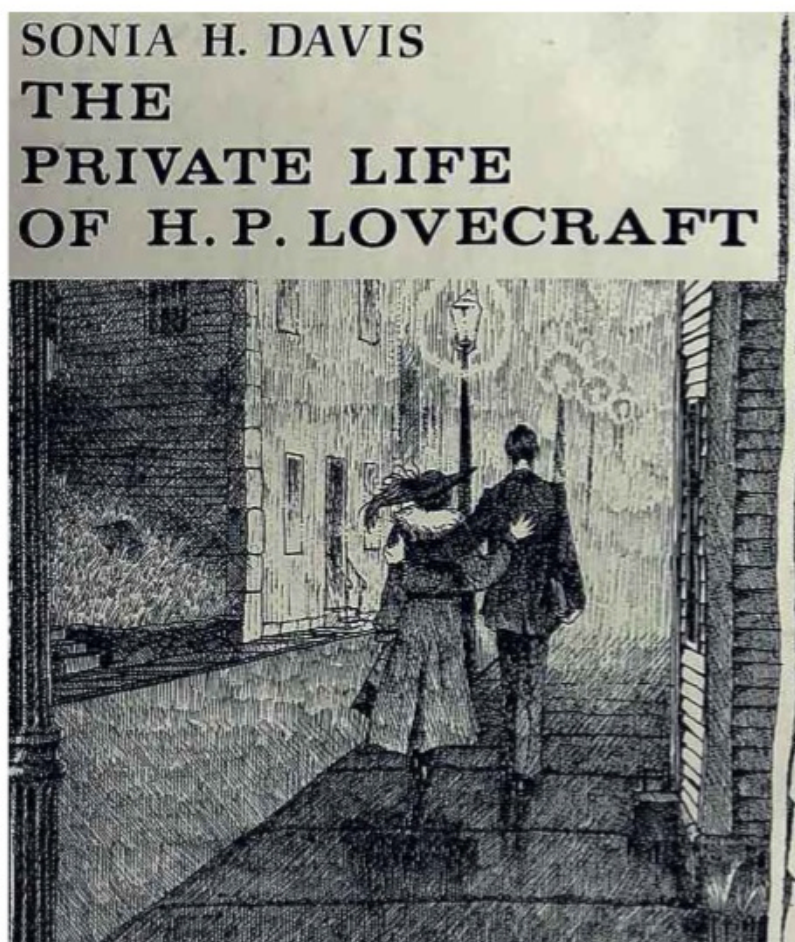
It was a maze of “hybrid squalor” and “dirty highways”, its population “a hopeless tangle and enigma”, with “Syrian, Spanish, Italian and negro elements impinging upon one another,” stifling the “fragments of Scandinavian and American belts lying not far distant.”²¹ “A babel of sound and filth” assaults the ears and eyes and nostrils, as “blasphemies of an hundred dialects assail the sky.” “More people,” Lovecraft tells us, “enter Red Hook than leave it.” One who did leave it – horrified at what he discovered there – is Thomas Malone, a New York police detective – Irish, of course – who uncovers a Satanic cult centred around a sinister church and responsible for a spate of kidnappings. At the story’s start, Malone is recovering from his ordeal in, of all places, Rhode Island. He is a rather odd example of a New York cop, given to mysticism, with “the Celt’s far vision of weird and hidden things”, as well as being a graduate of Dublin University and contributor to the *Dublin Review*.²² But then Lovecraft probably knew as much about real New York policeman as he did about his mysterious unseen Syrian neighbour.

Although littered with extra helpings of Lovecraft’s usual adjectives, “The Horror at Red Hook” is worth reading, and I will leave the reader this pleasure, or disturbance, as the case may be. But an outline here is necessary. The gist of the story concerns the strange activities of an aged scholar of Dutch descent, partial to the occult and esoteric, Robert Suydam, who becomes the leader of a cult of Devil-worshipping Yezidis, smuggled into America through the damp, slimy back alleys of Red Hook. Suydam lives in Flatbush, Lovecraft’s old

Robert Suydam becomes the leader of a cult of Devil-worshipping Yezidis



disgust and misery into actual violence, even against himself, although he talked of putting a bullet in his brain and of swallowing cyanide. Instead, he allowed his imagination to relieve some of the pressure. The result was “The Horror at Red Hook”,



ABOVE LEFT: Red Hook today – sky-high rents, hip venues and murals. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Lovecraft's 'hook-up' with Sonia Greene was ultimately a disaster. She recalled their relationship and time in Brooklyn in *The Private Life of HP Lovecraft*, written in the 1940s and finally published by Necronomicon Press in 1985.

neighbourhood, and is an authority on mediæval superstition. Shabby, unkempt, and reclusive, Suydam comes to the authorities' attention when his relatives raise the alarm over his odd behaviour; specifically, his spending large sums on ancient occult texts and the suspicious goings-on in a basement flat in which he entertains "the blackest and most vicious criminals" – all of foreign origin – who engage in "strange cries and chants and prancing of feet".²³ Understandably, the neighbours are concerned.

As a new wave of kidnappings terrorises the neighbourhood, Suydam appears, having gone through some mysterious transformation. He is now well-dressed and youthful and announces his engagement to a young society woman. Yet on their wedding night, at the start of their honeymoon voyage on a Cunard liner, a scream is heard from their stateroom as a tramp steamer draws aside the ship. Both Suydam and his bride have suffered some unspeakably hideous death, and the swarthy "ruffians" from the steamer, led by an Arab with a "hatefully negroid mouth", have come to claim the bodies, armed with a letter from Suydam giving them the authority to do so. Later, a raid on Suydam's basement flat reveals that the kidnappings have been part of a cult of human sacrifice involving the detested foreigners and aimed in some way at granting Suydam dark nefarious powers.

As mentioned, "The Horror at Red Hook" is not one of HPL's best efforts, nor is another work written at the time, "He", which is set in the backstreets of Greenwich Village and also has its protagonist recuperating in New England. In "He", Lovecraft writes that: "My coming

to New York had been a mistake." Though uttered in a fictional voice, it expressed an obvious truth. As Lovecraft had when he first saw Manhattan, the protagonist of "He" had looked for "poignant wonder and inspiration" – but, like Lovecraft, had found only "a sense of horror and oppression" that threatened to "master, paralyse, and annihilate me".²⁴ Although this is a fate suffered by most of Lovecraft's protagonists, it was one their creator escaped. For him, the horror at Clinton Street ended when, in late March 1926, he accepted his aunt Lillian's invitation to return home. By this time, his marriage to Sonia was conducted mostly through the post. They would never live together again. One of her last wifely acts was to pack the furniture shipped out to him and which was now, like him, returning to his ancestral home. As he confessed to Aunt Lilian, the "ghastly rashness & idiocy of 1924," was over.²⁵

NOTES

- 1** Quoted in L Sprague de Camp, *Lovecraft: A Biography* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976) p.6.
- 2** Ibid., p.265.
- 3** Ibid., p. 208.
- 4** ST Joshi, *HP Lovecraft: A Life* (West Warwick, RI: Necronomicon Press, 1996) p.328
- 5** De Camp, pp.214-15.
- 6** HP Lovecraft, *Selected Letters* (Sauk City, WI, 1965), pp.176-79.
- 7** Ibid., p.181.
- 8** De Camp, p.273.
- 9** Ibid., p.214.
- 10** They had, in fact, spent their honeymoon re-typing Lovecraft's rewrite of Houdini's "Imprisoned With the Pharaohs", after Lovecraft had lost the

original MS en route to the wedding. No doubt a Freudian would have remarked on the slip.

11 Joshi p.337.

12 Ibid., p.216.

13 In a letter Lovecraft wrote to his Aunt Lillian near the end of his stay in Brooklyn, he speaks of "loathsome Asiatic hordes" who "trail their dirty carcasses over streets where white men once moved," and how their "odious presence & twisted visage & stunted forms" will drive "proud, light-skinned Nordics" like himself to either "murder them" or be "carried shrieking to the madhouse." Italians, Portuguese, French-Canadians, the Irish and Jews receive similar reflections. De Camp, pp.268-70.

14 De Camp, p.242.

15 During the rest of Lovecraft's residence in Brooklyn, Sonia did return and stay with him occasionally, but continued to find work out of state.

16 Ibid. p. 265.

17 Ibid. p. 250.

18 Joshi p. 370.

19 Readers of Colin Wilson's *Order of Assassins* (1975) may recall that he likened Lovecraft's anti-modern rage to that of Hitler's in *Mein Kampf*.

20 HP Lovecraft, *Dagon* (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House, 1965) p. 242.

21 Ibid., p.243.

22 Ibid., pp.241-42.

23 Ibid., p.246.

24 Ibid., p.230.

25 De Camp, p.273.

For more on HPL, see **FT304:54-57, 369:32-39** and **390:28-35**.

♦ **GARY LACHMAN** is a regular contributor to FT and the author of many books on the links between consciousness, culture, and the Western esoteric tradition; his latest is *The Return of Holy Russia* (Inner Traditions, 2020).

NOID VS. NOID

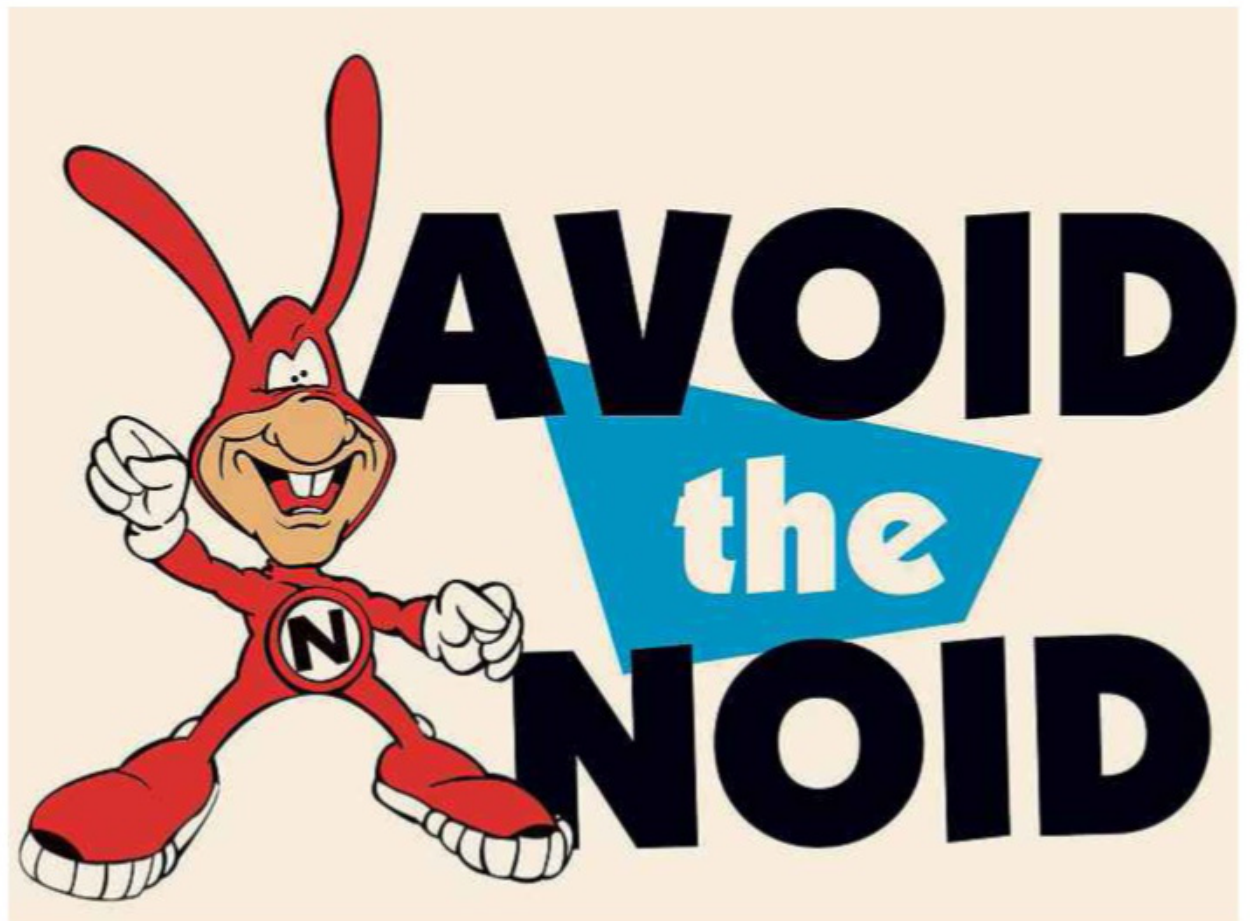
Three characters all named “Noid” collide in a paranoid conspiracy theory, involving wizards, Arctic shamans, video games, mental illness, cannabinoids, a shootout, Michael Jackson, Robert Anton Wilson and pizza. **JEFFREY VALLANCE** explains...

The Noid character, created in the 1980s, is an advertising mascot for Detroit-based Domino’s Pizza chain, with the catchy marketing slogan, “Avoid the Noid”. The evil wizard-like Noid wears a red, skin-tight, pointed-eared body suit with a black “N” inscribed in a white circle. The Noid is a physical manifestation of all the anxieties (or becoming annoyed – “a noid”) inherent in delivering pizza – in 30 minutes or less. Similar to a gremlin, the Noid tries to foil pizza delivery employees, but pathetically always fails.

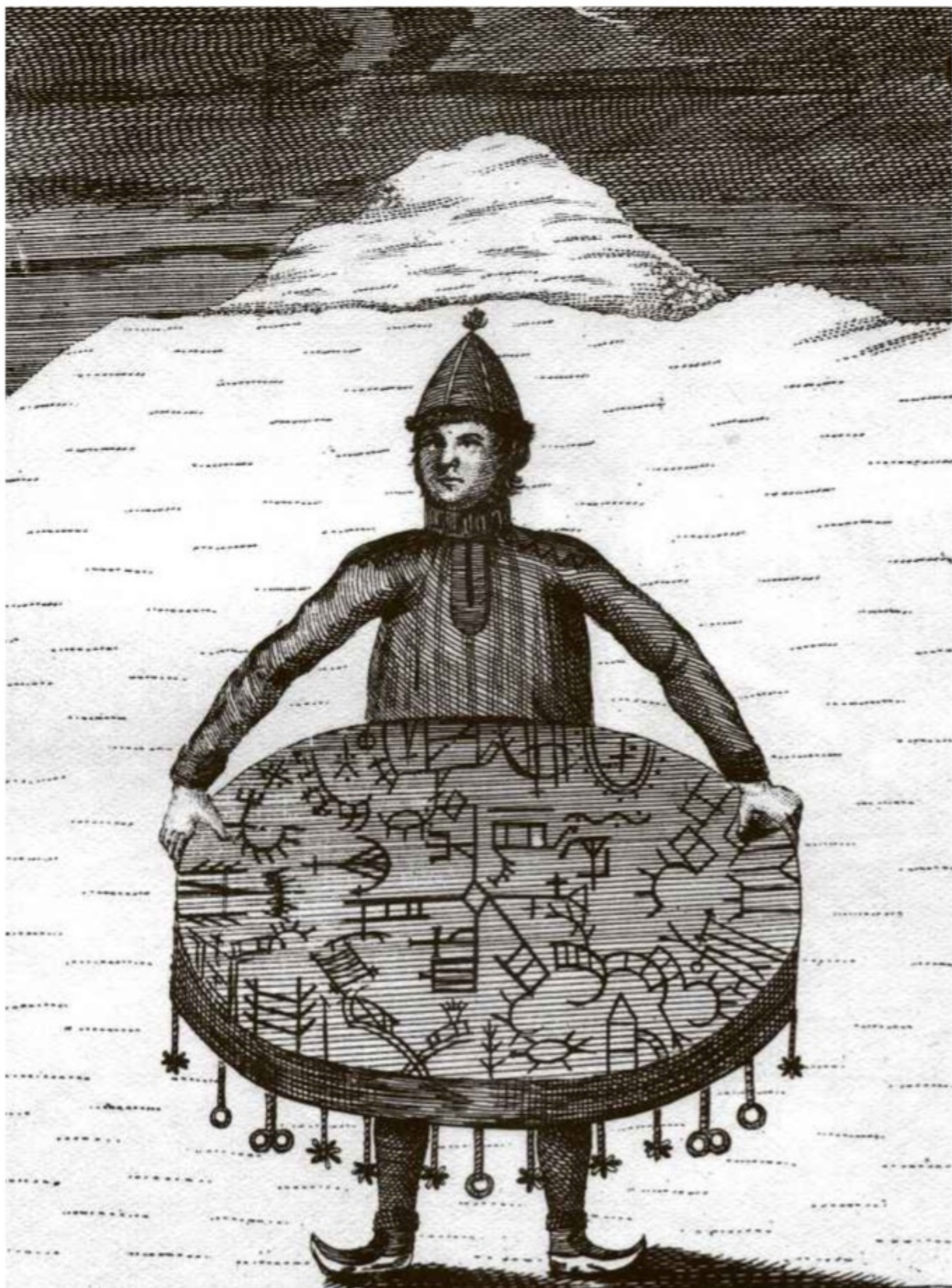
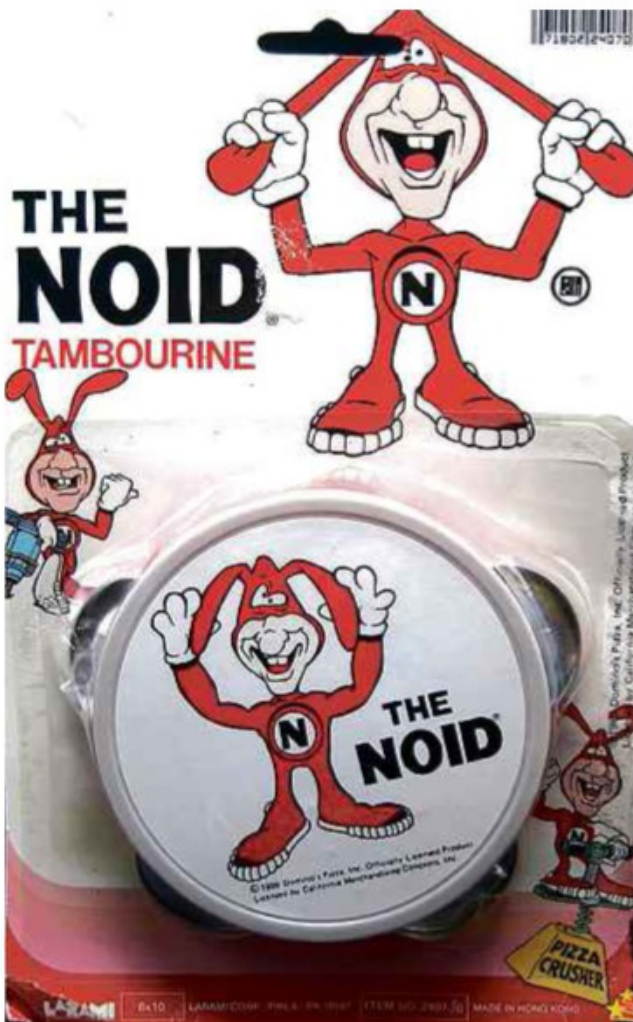
The graphic designer who created the Domino’s Noid surely must have had some knowledge of the Lapland *noid* – the traditional Saami shaman or wizard. The evil pizza wizard and the Lapp shaman share many surprisingly similar characteristics. They are both trickster/wizard characters dressed in red with supernatural powers. The pizza Noid sometimes wears a garish pointed wizard hat. The red ears of the Noid recall ancient Scandinavian rock paintings and symbols on Saami drums depicting figures with two or three pronged horns, believed to represent gods or shamans. The Siberian shamans were known for their horned headdresses symbolising their powerful reindeer god. The Lapp shaman sometimes wears a colourful pointed cap of “The Four Winds”. Although it is degrading to the Saami, their caps are sometimes likened to the multi-coloured court jester’s cap (or fools cap), complete with dangling cloth tipped with bells. For divination, the Lapp shaman *noid* employs a magic kettledrum, whereas the pizza Noid carries an equivalent drum-like tambourine [FT245:73-74].

THE NOID SHAMAN

Living in subarctic northern Sweden for three years, I became familiar with the Lapp (Saami) crafts and traditions, especially the rituals associated with the mysterious *noid* shamans. Traditionally, Lapland was considered to be the abode of devils, shamans, sorcerers, wizards, witches, fairies, trolls and wildmen. The Lapland Saami shaman or *noid*, (the Magi of the North, also spelled *nöjd*, *noyde* and *noajdde*) were believed to have power over the wind and the ability to raise storms. They also had



TOP: The Domino’s Pizza Noid. ABOVE: A Saami *noid* or *nöjd* shaman in Lapland.



TOP LEFT: A Saami *noid/nöjd* drum. ABOVE LEFT: A Domino's Noid tambourine. ABOVE RIGHT: An 18th-century engraving depicting a Saami shaman with his drum.

the gifts of second sight, mystic visions, extracorporeal travel, shapeshifting, invisibility, and the skill to conjure apparitions. The Saami shaman beats his drum until he reaches the specific rhythm and tone that sends him into a trancelike state of ecstasy. In this altered state, his soul travels to the spirit world to converse with the dead [FT192:44-49].

Siberian shamans feed psychedelic mushrooms to their reindeer. The animal's metabolism removes the toxins, leaving the hallucinogenic properties intact in the urine, which the shamans drink to "fly high". No one will speak of it, but there still are Saami shamans – however, these days they keep a low profile on account of historic cruel persecution by the Church. In the past, Swedish shamans were horrifically burnt alive at the stake. I recall one evening at a winter gathering in Jokkmokk, when a man rushed in from the bitter cold – he intensely rhythmically beat his *nöjd* drum

THE RED EARS OF THE NOID RECALL SYMBOLS ON SAAMI DRUMS OF FIGURES WITH TWO PRONGED HORNS

until he dropped to the floor unconscious, obviously in a trance state.

PARANOID

Kenneth Lamar Noid, 22, (from Albany, Georgia) believed that Dominos Pizza "Noid" on TV commercials was a personal attack on him [FT56:55]. He became annoyed when people started making fun of his name annoyingly saying, "Avoid the

Noid". What's more, Mr Noid thought that Domino's owner, Tom S Monaghan, had stolen his name and was stealthily snooping around his apartment. On 30 January 1989, Mr Noid, armed with a .457 calibre Magnum, held two employees hostage for over five hours at the Domino's restaurant at Chamblee, near Atlanta, Georgia. He forced employees to make him two special pizzas – and then call the police. Noid demanded \$100,000 in ransom, a getaway helicopter and a copy of the book *The Widow's Son* by Robert Anton Wilson.

The 1985 book *The Widow's Son* (advertised as "a fairy tale for paranoids") deals with secret societies, such as Rosicrucians, Jacobites, Masons, and the Illuminati. Throughout history, secret societies have played a crucial role in shaping conspiracy theories, so could that be why Mr Noid – believing he was the victim of a conspiracy controlled by Domino's Pizza – demanded a copy of *The Widow's Son*?

Domino's can't avoid Mr. Noid

Man charged in pizza store hostage-taking

BY MICHAEL BETZOLD
Free Press Staff Writer

A man named Noid, apparently upset at television commercials using the slogan "Avoid the Noid," held two Domino's Pizza employees hostage for six hours in an Atlanta suburb Monday, but they escaped while the sometimes irrational man ate two large pizzas, police said.

Chamblee Police Chief Reed Miller said Tuesday that Kenneth Lamar Noid, 22, of Albany, Ga., entered the store about 11 a.m. Monday and pulled a .357 magnum.

Noid told the employees that Domino's owner Tom Monaghan had stolen his name, said store manager Al Lassiter. Noid ordered employees to call the headquarters of Ann Arbor-based

The man told the two hostages that he was hungry, and they cooked him two large pizzas with everything. While he ate the pizzas, they escaped.

character called "the Noid" who tries

rational and at other times irrational."

He said Noid offered to exchange a hostage for a copy of a science fiction book, "The Widow's Son," but when a police officer brought the book, he reneged on his offer.

Lassiter said Noid told the hostages, Sean Burnsed, 21, and Darrell Wilson, 25, that he was hungry, and they cooked him two large pizzas with everything.

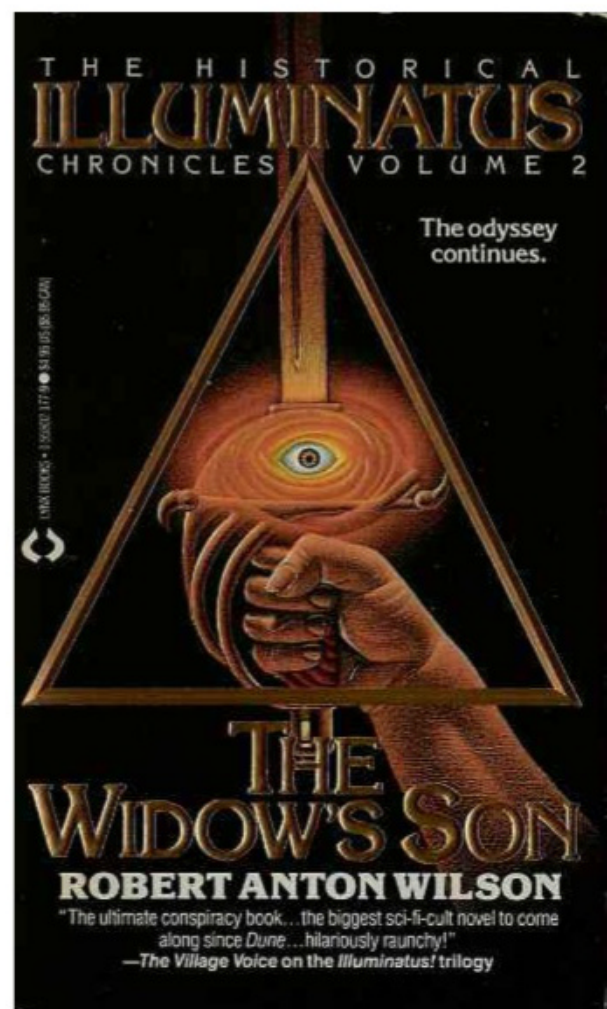
While Noid sat eating the pizzas with his gun in his lap, Burnsed and Wilson ran out the door. Shortly after that, Noid surrendered.

Noid's uncle, David Noid, said Noid had expressed anger to his mother, Julia, about the ads, "but I guess she didn't think it would rise to this."

Miller said Noid told police that



Kenneth Lamar Noid



LEFT: Newspaper reports on Kenneth Lamar Noid, who took employees hostage at a Domino's in Georgia. ABOVE: As well as a ransom and getaway helicopter, Noid demanded a copy of a Robert Anton Wilson book. BELOW: The incident seemed to be recalled in the Noid's Super Pizza Shootout game.

Occult author Robert Anton Wilson (1932-1999), a self-described agnostic mystic, was captivated by the theories of Charles Fort and often contributed to *FT*. He was friends with cryptozoologist Loren Coleman and co-authored books with Timothy Leary. The wizard-like Wilson was bestowed the illustrious title of "Pope Bob" by the Church of the SubGenius. He himself was the target for paranoia from a lot of conspiracy buffs. Wilson was aware that Mr Noid had requested a copy of his book during the Domino's incident. He wrote in his newsletter: "Noid got annoyed and perhaps a little paranoid too."

It is no coincidence that Mr Noid asked for a book on paranoid conspiracy theories; as such conspiracies possibly made him leery of the Domino's Noid. In Wilson's 1981 book *Masks of the Illuminati* (featuring the Loch Ness Monster), the characters are annoyed by the *föhn* (or *foehn*), a dry wind that blows down from Alpine regions such as the mountains of Lapland. A "foehn" is also a magic spell that manipulates the wind. Traditionally, *nöjd* shamans have this power over the wind. Wilson writes: "The border between the Real and the Unreal is not fixed, but just marks the last place where rival gangs of shamans fought each other to a standstill."

When the police finally arrived at Domino's Pizza, Mr Noid fired four warning shots into the ceiling. While he ate the pizzas with his gun in his lap, he

"NOID GOT ANNOYED AND PERHAPS A LITTLE PARANOID TOO"



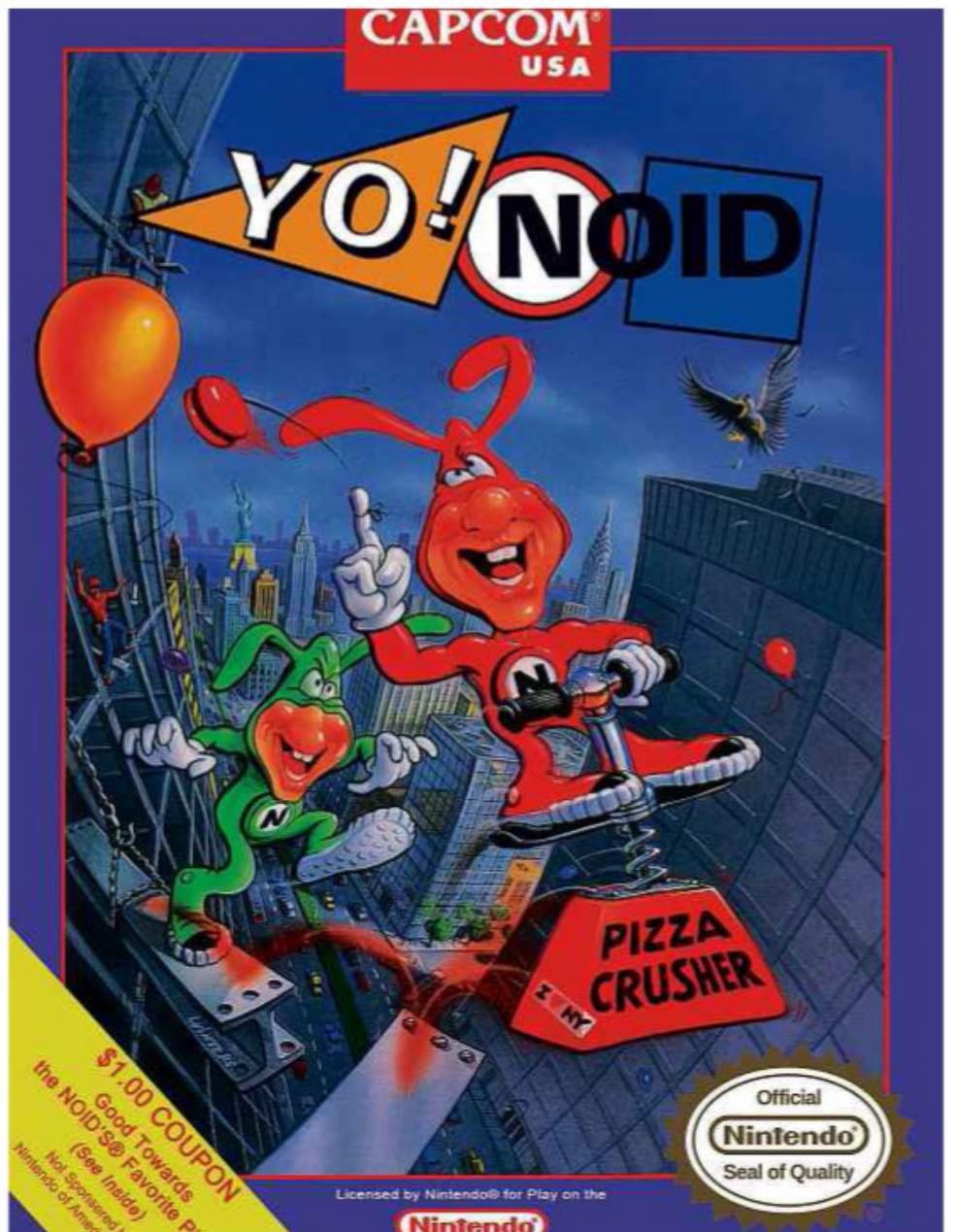
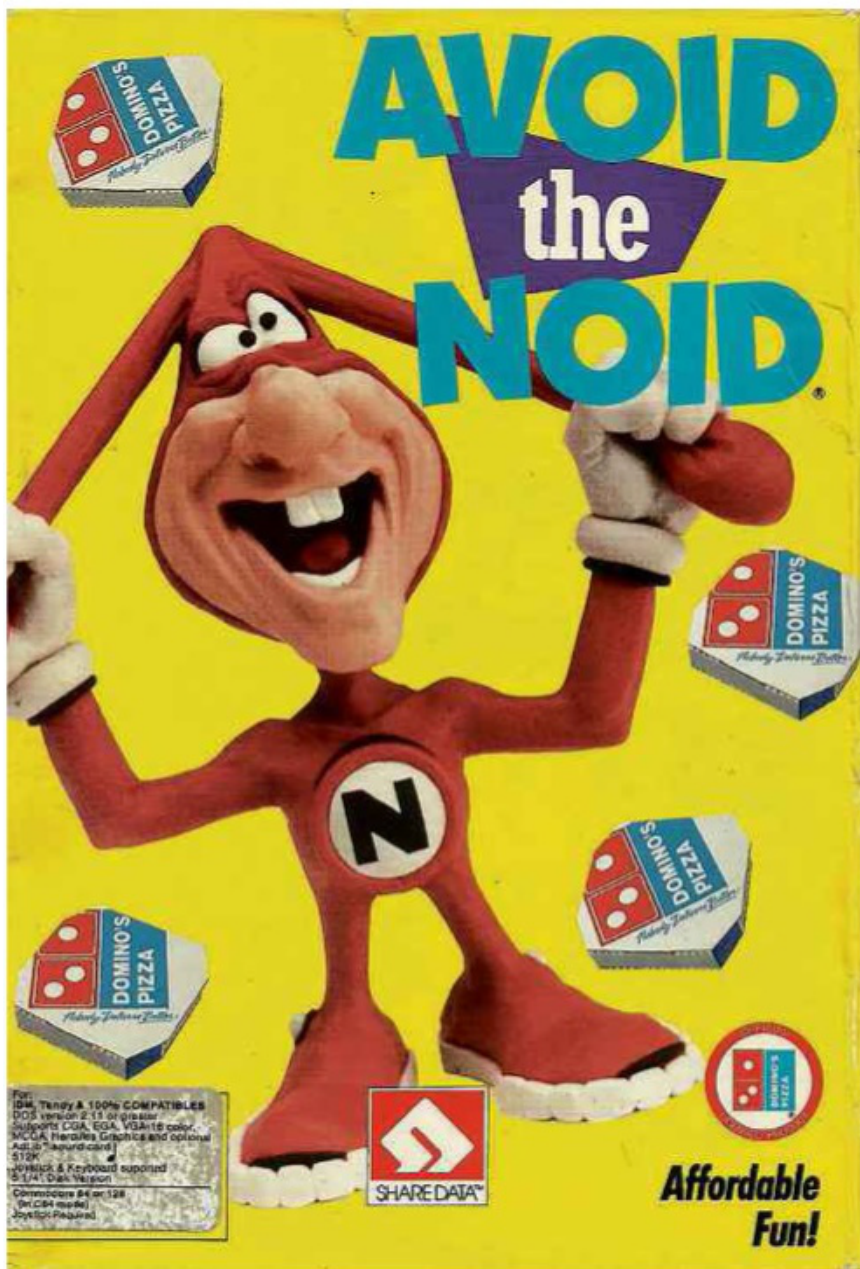
turned his back for a moment and the hostages escaped – a few minutes later he surrendered to the police. Atlanta police chief Reed Miller said: "He's paranoid". Mr Noid was charged with kidnapping, aggravated assault, extortion and possession of a firearm during a crime. He was found not guilty by reason of insanity. Kenneth Lamar Noid spent three months in a mental institution, and sadly eventually committed suicide in 1995. This incident caused Domino's Pizza to temporarily suspend using the Noid as their mascot.

POP GOES THE NOID

The 1988 film *Moonwalker* (starring Michael Jackson) has a section called "Speed Demon" in which Jackson is chased by the Domino's Noid, who is later arrested. The film perhaps foretells Mr Noid's arrest by the police in the coming year. Also in 1988, a Saturday morning cartoon series called *The Noids* was planned for CBS, but due to complaints by parents that it was merely an advertising ploy to market pizza to children, the idea was abandoned.

In 1989, a computer game named *Avoid the Noid* was released. The goal of the game is to deliver a pizza within a half-hour time-frame while being harassed by aggravated Noids. In 1990, another video game called *Yo! Noid* was released in which the Noid is actually a superhero, using his magic yo-yo (like gauchos with *boleadoras*) to battle evil.

In an episode of *The Simpsons* TV show



ABOVE LEFT AND RIGHT: The Noid was a popular enough character to star in two video games in 1989 and 1990. FAR LEFT: The 'Four Winds' hat sometimes worn by Saami shamans seems to bear an uncanny resemblance to the Noid's long red ears.

"noids" became short for "synthetic cannabinoids," drugs that produce an artificial high similar to cannabis, but with the side effect of profound paranoia. The slang street names for noids include; Spice, Wizard, Joker, Genie, Hysteria, Time Traveller, Mad Hatter, Karma and Funky Buddha. Furthermore, the slang term "noid" in popular culture has come to mean: paranoid, crazy, insane, weird and strange – basically all the things we like as forteans.

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FT56:55; Jeffrey Vallance: "Lapp of the Gods", FT192:44-49, Feb 2005; Jeffrey Vallance: "Lapp Shaman Drum," FT245:73-74, Feb 2009.

♦ JEFFREY VALLANCE is an artist, writer, curator, explorer and paranormal experienter. He has published over 10 books, including *Blinky the Friendly Hen*, *Relics and Reliquaries* and *The Vallance Bible*. He is currently working on a new anthology, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, to be released next year.

in 2000 called "Homer vs. Dignity," the Noid makes a cameo appearance looming overhead as a huge Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon. In 2001, in yet another episode of *The Simpsons* called "She of Little Faith", set in the Springfield Church, the Noid preaches an inspired sermon on "The Sanctity of Deliciousness". In 2006, a shockingly graphic episode of *Family Guy* called "Deep Throats" shows the character Mayor Adam West brutally killing the Noid by slamming his blood-splattered head against a wall. Ouch!

In 2011, the video game *The Noid's Super Pizza Shootout* appeared, calling to mind Mr Noid's real pizza shootout. In 2016, a pinball machine came out called "The

Domino's Spectacular Pinball Adventure" featuring the Noid, who spins around on a UFO-shaped "pizza crusher". In the game, Domino's employees battle a massive Noid brandishing a gun (again recalling Mr Noid's .457 Magnum). An army tank fires pizza ingredients at the giant Noid. In the background of the pinball marquee, a rebellious youth spray paints "Noid Rules" on a brick wall.

Ever since Kenneth Lamar Noid held Domino's Pizza employees hostage at gunpoint, his saga, like a conspiracy theory, has been incorporated and interwoven into many of the subsequent paranoid storylines involving the Noid wizard character.

More recently, the pejorative term



THE PINK PLAGUE

In the second of two trips down the Amazon, **SD TUCKER** re-enters the strange world of Brazilian politics, where the government's distinctly anti-scientific coronavirus response seems based more on the desire to prevent homosexuality than to protect health...

Last month, we saw how the foul-mouthed, Trump-imitating Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro and his Foreign Minister Ernesto Araujo argued against implementing a full lockdown against the coronavirus epidemic on the grounds that it was just “a little cold”, and that social-distancing measures would not only ruin the economy but also allow the Communists and globalists who control sinister organisations like the World Health Organisation (WHO) to take over our societies by stealth. By implementing a programme of ‘sanitary correctness’ to augment their beloved political correctness, Cultural Marxists in the WHO and UN would imprison citizens in their homes, seize education systems, turn children gay, and convince them not to breed. By destroying Western economies and birthrates by promoting dangerous creeds like homosexuality or belief in global warming, the WHO hoped that citizens would become so depressed they would willingly destroy their own economies and begin to commit racial suicide through mass homosexuality, thus ensuring the inexorable rise of Red China, where Covid-19 originated in the first place. The best solution was to pursue a form of Trumpian right-wing ‘meta-politics’, in which free-market economics and good old-fashioned Christian values would be restored to save mankind from what Araujo himself has dubbed ‘the Communa-Virus’.

Did Bolsonaro and Araujo discover this conspiracy themselves? Not necessarily. Unlike his idol, Donald Trump, Bolsonaro actually reads books, and, after winning the 2018 election, proudly displayed the four key texts that inspired his victory: the Bible, Brazil's constitution, Churchill's memoirs and *The Minimum You Need to Know Not to Be an Idiot* by the bestselling former student of alchemy turned right-wing media pundit, philosopher and author Olavo de Carvalho, now so famous in Brazil that he is known purely by his first name, like Elvis. Post-*junta*, Olavo was one of the few conservative journalists allowed in print, making his name by combining extreme invective and mad



“THE LABEL OF REALITY SHOULD NOT BE DEFINED BY SCIENCE”

conspiracy theories with intellectual arguments. Olavo is known as the ‘John the Baptist’ of Brazilian conservatism, but disputes he is the President's guru, indicating they never met until after Bolsonaro was elected. He is closer to the President's politician sons, who had engaged with him online, where he runs his own “genius factory” philosophy course (several cabinet members have been students). Olavo isn't wholly admiring of Bolsonaro, saying the

President doesn't truly grasp economics, but that “even if he has a shit government, he won't steal”, unlike his left-wing predecessors. Yet Olavo has also boasted of being responsible for the appointment of the hitherto-obscure Ernesto Araujo; after reading Araujo's blog Olavo declared: “This guy is a genius! He has to be Foreign Minister!” And then, suddenly, he was. It is possible to both over- and under-estimate Olavo's official



LEFT: Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who after professing scepticism about Covid-19 has since contracted it himself. **BELOW:** Olavo de Carvalho's bestseller was on the President's list of key texts.

influence but, considering the President once operated his own gold-mine as a “hobby”, he would be naturally well-disposed towards alchemists.

In January, Olavo's daughter Heloisa released a tell-all story about her dad, including an extract from a 1980s alchemy guide of his explaining how it was possible to cure a headache by staring at a cat until the point when its bottom begins to look like the Moon – whereupon your migraine will fly up inside the feline, causing it to fall asleep for “15 hours straight”. When it comes to coronavirus, Olavo is more sceptical, having shared a video claiming Bill Gates patented the disease to slash the world's population. Olavo himself also filmed a clip arguing that the “supposed” pandemic “doesn't exist”, with “not a single confirmed case of coronavirus death”. The plague was thus “science fiction” and “the most widespread manipulation of public opinion that has ever happened in human history.” We can see where Araujo got his own ‘cure worse than the disease’ mantra from. Olavo is also an anti-vaxxer, retweeting a claim that vaccines “kill you or drive you crazy. Never give one to your child”, and worried about harmful ingredients in our food, such as the cells from aborted foetuses they put in Pepsi as sweeteners. Yet cigarettes are fine. They only cause lung cancer if, “with each puff, you keep repeating: ‘This shit is killing me!’” – yet another joy-draining left-wing “form of suicidal self-hypnosis”.

NOBODY RESPECTS THE SPANISH INQUISITION!

Olavo's bigger feud is with science, not specifically medicine: “There are no limits to stupidity when it is scientific.” The Enlightenment, being the source of the French Revolution and thus much left-wing dogma, was evil. Science's many 18th-century lightbulb moments were truly sources of darkness, not a secular *fiat lux*: “Enlightenment means... the love of electricity, a newfound energy that the late poet-philosopher Percy B Shelley (a

theorist and practitioner of incest in his spare time) would come to celebrate as a great hope for control of behaviour; if... man was just an electric machine [as in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*], it should be possible to straighten his wires so as to eliminate 'undesirable' behaviours, such as Christianity." The true Frankenstein's monster was the Enlightenment itself, which spawned "Positivism, anarchism, fascism, Communism, the New Age, indiscriminate abortion and the world drug-empire." Cultural Marxists propagate the myth of the "time of lights", but "almost the entire narrative of the origin of modern sciences" is really "a colossal advertising sham" aimed at making Catholicism look bad. Galileo "never suffered pressure or intimidation" for his ideas, being treated with "the greatest respect and deference" by the Inquisition; they probably even brought him a comfy chair. Galileo's 'persecution' is the founding myth of modern science, yet the "enlightened dictatorships" which replaced Christianity were worse; Stalin and Mao killed far more 'heretics' than any Pope. But the Cultural Marxist "micro-intellectuals" who now control our universities preach the opposite. They even teach the theories of that "tremendous weirdo" Sir Isaac Newton, who "spread the virus" of science abroad, leading to a world which even today "remains ill with Newtonianism."

Besides disliking electricity, Olavo apparently denies such standard scientific truths as the Earth being round and orbiting the Sun; yet his position is actually more nuanced than it sounds. He accuses many scientists of inventing complex mathematical theories and using them to replace actual observable physical reality, *a la* string-theory. To an observer on Earth, it does *look* as if the Sun moves around our planet, yet the average zombie just accepts the opposite without bothering to ascertain it directly for himself via Galileo-style experiments and calculations. In fact, there is impressive eyewitness testimony on record that the Sun can move around in the sky as if alive, as during the appearance of the Virgin Mary at Fatima in 1917 (see **FT136:8-9, 137:66, 197:8-9, 355:22-23**). Thousands of people saw the Sun dance for Mary – way more than have ever seen the Earth orbiting the Sun from outer space. Olavo maintains the political importance of miracles is underestimated, as they show the world around us may not be as Marxist-tainted science would have us believe. When neurologists tell us consciousness is but an epiphenomenon, and the soul and self mere illusions, that contradicts the direct evidence of our senses – just as science's lie that the Sun did not dance at Fatima denies the evidence of witnesses' own eyes. "The label of 'reality'" should not be solely



ABOVE: Araujo (l), Olavo (c) and Bolsonaro (r) contemplate the disturbingly gay state of the (pre-Covid) modern world at a dinner at the Brazilian Embassy in Washington, DC, in March 2019.

defined by "science and the Food and Drug Administration." By dethroning God from the centre of the Universe, such depressing Marxist materialism laid the groundwork for our later enforced species-suicide. So, when Olavo doubts heliocentrism, he isn't actually *denying* it as such, but reserving personal judgement for philosophical purposes, as seen in statements like: "I have read eloquent scientific evidence that vaccines are useful *and* that they are harmful, and I humbly consider myself in doubt until further notice." He's almost a fortean.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DEVIANT

If not quite a fortean, Olavo used to be a Traditionalist, along the lines of figures like René Guenon, Julius Evola (**FT191:40-45**) and Aleksandr Dugin (see **FT349:48-51**). A one-time member of a Sufi commune and writer for a Brazilian equivalent of *FT*, Olavo became disillusioned with mysticism and in the early 1990s, went off to university to study philosophy, leaving without graduating. That the autodidact's subsequent independently researched thesis on Aristotle was rejected by the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science may account for his hostility towards academia. Following the success of his ensuing book, *The Collective Imbecile*, he moved into political commentary before migrating to the US in 2005, following "weekly death-threats from leftist maniacs". One Guenonian idea he retained was that we are living in *kali yuga*, an age of Cultural Marxist-inspired inversion in which everything has been turned upside-down, with victims becoming criminals, lies truth and ugliness beauty. Or, as he puts it, like Max Nordau reborn, contemporary aesthetics now celebrate only repulsive things like

"vampires, the death of the soul, cruelty, the man who shoves his arm up to the elbow inside another man's anus." Women can't even be women anymore, but murderous mænads: "By cutting off her husband's penis... Lorena [Bobbitt] has become a symbol of the ideal woman of our time" (see **FT75:28**).

Such obscenity is sadly necessary to dispel the enchantment cast by *kali yuga* Magic Marxists: "[Left-wing] ideas... are not images of reality, they are magic potions, which are used to bewitch the public... And a spell is not discussed at the theoretical level: a spell is undone by showing the victim's wads of hair and scraps of clothing which the sorcerer, in a stealthy foray, hid among the remains of corpses." Founder of the website 'Maskless Media', Olavo says *kali yuga*'s chief illusion-casters today are 'fake news journalists', whom he enjoys inviting to his home and insulting while his family sit on the sofa, smoking and eating burgers. He posts videos of these ordeals online for his countless followers to laugh at. "You're a slut," he told one interviewer. "You come to my house with this cynical smile... You're worth nothing, woman! ... I want you to know that you disgusted my whole family." But, as Olavo has defended President Bolsonaro's own off-colour rants as misunderstood "hyperbole and jokes", maybe he just says these things in a similar spirit.

Olavo may sound mad, but he is actually a respected thinker, the man who did most to introduce the thought of the major political philosopher Eric Voegelin into Brazil. His 'shock-jock' persona – further honed in his radio-show *True Outspoke* – could be just a medium to disseminate his message more effectively now that low educational standards have led to the "intellectual slum"

ALAN SANTOS / FLICKR



STRANGE STATESMEN #40

of “planned global microcephaly” among the populace. He knows that, as politics is downstream of culture, the most important task is to inject his own idea-viruses into the Brazilian social bloodstream; while governments come and go, once ideas themselves are unleashed, we’re stuck with them – just like Covid-19. He has called Bolsonaro a “condom”, but the President must have developed a split, as his election, coming earlier than Olavo expected, was a “premature ejaculation” for his brand of conservatism. But, when corruption scandals and economic mismanagement toppled left-wing governments during the 2010s and crowds carried placards saying ‘OLAVO WAS RIGHT!’, he could see his own meme multiplying exponentially, just as “the neo-Communist virus” had done before it. He gained actual ideological adherents, called *Olavetes*, and became a social media giant. “The great writer is like a second government,” Olavo realised, modestly quoting Solzhenitsyn. “Intellectual influence is something that transcends and encompasses politics.” He would rather not hold direct political office himself (although he did once offer to become Brazil’s US ambassador), preferring to develop his own geopolitical theory from the margins and see others like Bolsonaro and Araujo implement it. Araujo’s proposal to create an alliance of the world’s three biggest Christian nations – Brazil, Russia and the USA – to counteract globalism, China and radical Islam, is a fruit of Olavo’s own thought.

WHAT DID THE ROMANS DO FOR US?

Olavo teaches that with the god-like Emperors of the Sol Invictus cult, ancient Rome acted hubristically to transform man into a false deity with the ability to recreate reality itself in his own image. However, the “ghost” of Rome “refuses to die” and still seeks to “possess the lives” of susceptible rulers “as if they were tools for [Rome’s] own resurrection”. First to be invaded by the spirit of Rome was Henry VIII, a “delusional murderer” and Stalin prototype who “stole Christ’s own crown”, broke from the One True Faith and made himself head of his own religion, rendering him a parodic reincarnation of Cæsar. The “demonic farce” of the “self-sacralised state” was thus unleashed, and political figures like Napoleon and science-worshippers like Auguste Comte later tried to remake the world around them to fit in with their own ideas of what reality *should* look like, rather than accepting existence for what it *actually* was. As Rome tried to remake the world in its own image, so the Marxist-inspired global ‘meta-capitalism’ of today seeks to do the same, destroying natural goods like Christianity, heterosexuality, femininity and the family as inconvenient obstacles. It may seem odd that capitalism can be Marxist, but Olavo sees an unholy *Gleichschaltung* alliance between big business and big government,



ABOVE: “Olavo Tem Razão” (“Olavo was right”) has been a popular slogan on banners all over Brazil.

with excessive state regulation facilitating unchallengeable monopolies, just as big industrial concerns were once protected in the USSR. Democracy is thus a sham, controlled secretly by ‘The Syndicate’ – big banks, the UN, and so on. Just as Henry VIII had Thomas More beheaded, so the modern-day Henrys will send you to the gulag for expressing non-PC views. By capturing our schools, WHO-types continue Henry’s work of transforming reality into its *kali yuga* opposite, but not by crudely beheading brave dissenters like Thomas More: “The New World Order does not cut heads; instead, it ensures that they do not grow to the point where they need to be cut.”

The only way to combat this is by promoting what is now *Bolsonarism*, whose anti-gay, anti-globalist rhetoric seems to spring directly from Olavo’s thought. A leftist himself in his 1960s youth, Olavo studied the advice of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci that, with Communism rejected by voters, Lenin-lovers had to initiate a ‘long march through the institutions’ of law, education and the media, stealthily imposing ever more outrageous mores of Cultural Marxism so slowly that voters wouldn’t even realise. Reasonable-sounding liberal measures were only the first steps towards the long-term goal of legalising pædophilia, bestiality and even cannibalism. Olavo can “prove” the existence of “a worldwide movement for the implementation of pædophilia” upon mankind... but has sadly misplaced the relevant documents because “I don’t even have a secretary”. In columns like 2002’s ‘A Hundred Years of Pædophilia’ – published in the leading newspaper *O Globo*, not a dubious fringe-journal – Olavo stated that Christianity alone had saved little boys from being abused across the Roman Empire; today, a sinister cabal has infiltrated the

Catholic Church in a Gramscian manner, flooding it with gay-only appointments to “force the massive entrance of homosexuals” through the Pope’s back door, so to speak. Any straight trainee priests who slipped through the net were “forced by their superiors to submit to homosexual conduct” to turn them gay. Unable to resist the temptation of choirboys, this army of queer clergy “ended up yielding to the general infant-juvenile orgy”. The resulting headlines have not been good.

Olavo later argued that another globo-gay aim was to cover up how the UN itself was nothing but a giant child-sex ring. Referring to scandals involving the “new clergy” of UN peace-keepers paying underage African refugees to prostitute themselves, he lamented how these “multinational child-teasers” were hardly mentioned by the media, with priests instead being turned into a handy “crime emblem” to take all the heat: “After all, doesn’t the Church, just as Christ Himself, exist to take away the world’s sins?”

I don’t wish to appear hypocritical here. As anyone who has read my own books will know, I agree with several of Olavo’s general basic ideas myself, and admire his outspoken nature. But the impression I get reading him and his followers is of a group of men who have identified a number of negative modern social trends and, seeking to explain them, accidentally ended up rewriting *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, replacing the word ‘Jews’ with ‘gay globalists’. Ideologies, once sneezed out, self-replicate and infect autonomously just like viruses, as Olavo has himself explicitly taught; they don’t need undercover agents poisoning the wells. And the thing with viruses is that anyone can be infected – even Olavo. The latest Olavo-flash came in January, when he was intubated in hospital for a respiratory complaint, apparently from a urinary tract infection. But by March, he had changed his mind: “I already got the coronavirus. It almost killed me... I have no other explanation for all the shit that happened to me a couple of months ago.” Give him time and I’m sure he’ll invent one.

NOTES

You can find a selection of Olavo’s best articles, in English and Portuguese, online at <http://old.olavodecarvalho.org>. An admiring introduction to his thought is at <https://politicalsciencereviewer.wisc.edu/index.php/psr/article/view/600/600>. A critical three-part dismissal begins at <https://epoca.globo.com/a-derradeira-analise-da-obra-de-olavo-de-carvalho-para-nunca-ter-de-le-lo-23556545>. Some other articles consulted were: <https://epoca.globo.com/guilherme-amado/a-licao-de-olavo-para-curar-dor-de-cabeca-com-alquimia-24198582>; [www.vice.com/pt_br/article/bjeb3z/cientistas-rebatem-as-ideias-de-olavo-de-carvalho](https://vice.com/pt_br/article/bjeb3z/cientistas-rebatem-as-ideias-de-olavo-de-carvalho); www.cartacapital.com.br/saude/olavo-de-carvalho-renega-coronavirus-essa-epidemia-nao-existe/; www.clickpb.com.br/brasil/olavo-de-carvalho-diz-que-foi-infectado-pelo-coronavirus-280355.html; www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/12/brazil-olavo-de-carvalho-jair-bolsonaro/604117/; www.americasquarterly.org/article/jair-bolsonaros-guru/; <https://veja.abril.com.br/politica/eu-sou-o-segundo-governo/>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olavo_de_Carvalho; <https://epoca.globo.com/sociedade/noticia/2017/10/olavo-de-carvalho-o-guru-da-direita-que-rejeita-o-que-dizem-seus-fas.html>; www.acton.org/pub/commentary/2018/11/21/intellectual-maverick-behind-brazils-conservative-wave. If you want to see what other *kali yuga*-hating political gurus make of coronavirus, head to www.thenation.com/article/politics/covid-traditionalist-bannon/putin/, where you can hear Aleksandr Dugin say Covid-19 is “a kind of punishment for globalisation” and “a sign of the End of Times” in which Western lands like America “must choose now between life and liberalism.”

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 **RIDGEBACK**

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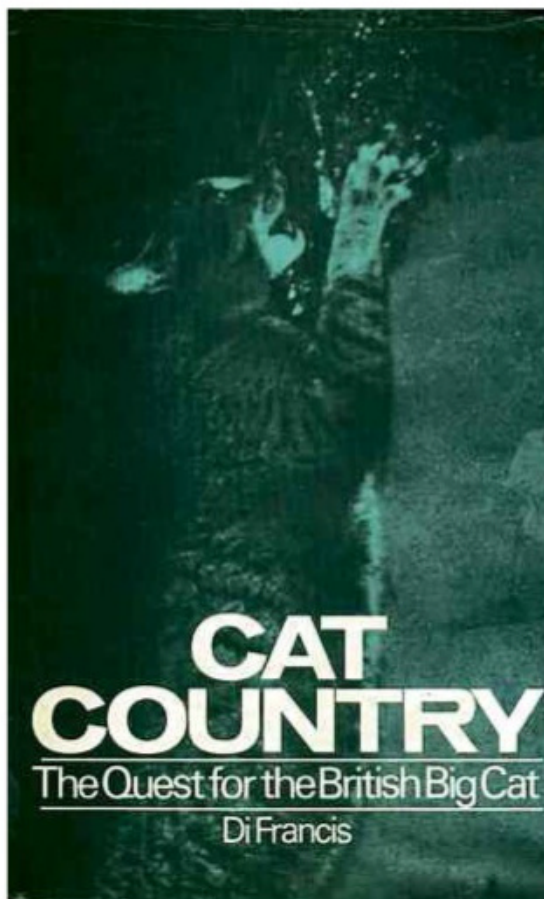
BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

NO 56. BIG CATS INDEED... BUT ARE THEY ALIEN?

We were mildly amused a month or two back to read that armed police had been called to deal with a savannah cat. (Attentive readers will have seen the account: **FT395:9**.) The savannah is an odd, but not that uncommon, hybrid of the African serval and your average household moggin – although given their relative sizes, one's imagination is stretched to picture the necessary copulatory arrangements. To those of us familiar with the serval, having tooled-up Plods out to deal with its smaller offspring strikes us as what you might call overkill. Not that servals and savannahs are exactly titchy, but they do have lovely smiles, endearingly huge ears and a phenomenal purr; in some parts of Africa they're kept as pets. And are presumably kept away from small children, for they have a very powerful swipe, which they use to knock fish senseless. None of which is entirely a digression from our subject, because there is a persistent assumption that the big cats – usually called *alien* big cats – seen padding about the British countryside are exotic to these islands and have escaped from circuses, zoos and eccentric households; there exists a factoid that after 1976 with the passage of the Dangerous and Wild Animals Act, the number of big cat sightings dramatically increased, as people dumped their unusual pets rather than undergo the (probably pricey) licensing process to keep them legally. Not to mention wanting to avoid being suffocated by bureaucrats. But in the book recommended here, the author takes a distinctly different and original tack.

Di Francis's *Cat Country* is something of a circular book, in the sense that unlike most tomes with a big idea it doesn't work its way through the evidence before springing its amazing conclusion on you: she presents her basic thesis in the first few pages, and then works through the evidence to justify it. So it's not exactly a plot spoiler to take the same route.

Francis proposes that while some (perhaps a majority?) of the big cat sightings in the UK may well be exotics, there is a core of native big cats that has survived and evolved down the centuries, perhaps from before the last Ice Age. Changes in agricultural practice – notably the destruction of hedgerows, and mechanisation – over recent decades will, she argues, have reduced the cats' habitat, and they are in effect an endangered species. The problem is that the animals don't officially exist, so can't be officially protected. Her solution is to set up a national reporting centre to identify where the cats are and, ultimately, what they are. That they exist she does not doubt; it's 'just' a matter of convincing the scientists. As far as we know, such a census has yet to be attempted; so while big cats continue to be reported in the UK, they remain at the mercy of the armed and nervous.



Francis clearly regards those scientists who engage with big cat reports as obtuse and obstinate, which leads her into caricature, or at least a false trichotomy: according to her, said scientists dismiss big cat reports as the product of drunks,

liars or the insane. But there's also the honestly misperceived animal, as well as the escapers, who may or may not form breeding pairs to continue their feral lines, and may or may not last long enough in the wild to be spotted. But where, she says 'the boffins' want to know, are the photographs?

To which she makes two points: first, few of us troop about the countryside festooned with cameras, and even though this was written in that long-gone age before the almost ubiquitous presence in pockets of camera-phones, even these gadgets take time to get in camera mode. By which time the average Surrey Puma or whatever will have legged it into the undergrowth, maybe up a tree. Besides which, we add, our own observations of narrowly avoided collisions suggest that a startling proportion of the pedestrian populace spends vastly more time peering at its phone screen than attending to the manifold fascinations of the world about them, so the big cats go happily unnoticed (and leg it just the same).

Francis launches an original thought on the notoriously fickle nature of eyewitness testimony: what if all those legends of big black dogs skulking nightly around the British countryside are actually based on sightings of big black cats? She doesn't explore one problematic aspect of this proposal, although she makes an otherwise plausible case. Black dogs are frequently described as having glowing red eyes. Foxes' and badgers' eyes reflect orange-red in lamplight at night, and it's conceivable that this is what some black dog witnesses are reporting. The domestic cat's eyes reflect a greeny-white. So it would have been helpful – even informative – to know what the reflected colour of the known big cats' eyes are.

Likewise, it would have been helpful to have had an illustrated (to scale) table of the known big cats' relative weights and dimensions, so that when a witness reports something "about the size of" a puma, a lynx or a leopard, we know precisely what they mean, and might even make an educated guess as to their accuracy. It would also be handy to know which (if any) of the big cats can interbreed. So many witnesses describe what seem to be mixtures of known animals that the question naturally arises. If on the other



ABOVE: A sign requesting information about big cat sightings in West Sussex.

hand there is a 'living fossil' quietly abiding in these islands, the matter may not be that important.

These grumps, or suggested improvements, aside, this is a valuable book. For modern sightings she wherever possible "personally checked the statements, either by interviewing the witnesses or by talking to staff at the police stations involved." Other accounts "are from letters received personally during the course of my investigation." Francis was nothing if not thorough.

The heart of the book is a 70-odd page catalogue of sightings from the countries of the United Kingdom. This, readers can pick over at their leisure; as one account succeeds another in varying degrees of detail there is the danger that the eyes glaze over. Francis redeems this with a taxonomy of what she has found: there seem to be four basic types of big cat in Britain and Ireland, which she describes as follows.

Type A: A nocturnal "large black leopard-like cat with eyes that glow red in the dark", that lives in the woods and of a size anywhere "between that of a spaniel and a Great Dane" and is able to bring down a deer or full-grown sheep.

Type B: Also a nocturnal forest-dweller, the same range in size as Type A, and likewise able to prey successfully on deer and sheep, resembling a lion or puma, coloured "from reddish-brown to ginger or golden-fawn". "These two animals [A and B] could be colour variations of the same species".

Type C: The lynx. But: "Could this be the juvenile of Type B? All big cats... show spotted or striped coats as juveniles".

Type D: A "cat-like animal whose coat pattern resembles that of a tiger or Tasmanian wolf [the thylacine]. The ground-colour ranges from brown to

"A WISE MAN
WILL MAKE
BETTER USE OF
AN IDLE
PAMPHLET,
THAN A FOOL
WILL DO OF
SACRED
SCRIPTURE."

John Milton

yellow, with grey stripes".

Earlier in the book Francis has selected the melanistic leopard and the puma (aka mountain lion, cougar, even panther) – or their derivatives – as her favourite candidates for British Big Cat, and given defensible reasons why. But there remains the nagging question as to their origins. So she moves on from her taxonomy to explore the possibility that the UK's big cat is a 'living fossil' – a survivor from before ancient times when (according to Holinshed) even lions roamed our green and pleasant land. There is no shortage of living fossil animals, some of whose lineages stretch back to the days of the dinosaurs – frogs, crocodiles and turtles among them; even the humble woodlouse. Cats as we know them appeared about 12 million years ago, during the Oligocene, which began 36 million years ago. We

know that among British cats were lion, cheetah, leopard and lynx. What isn't certain is when – indeed if – these animals became entirely extinct. As Francis says, plain- or forest-dwelling animals tend not to leave a fossil record: "If a leopard crawls away onto the forest to die, within weeks if not days the scavengers will have done their work... Nothing is left to tell us when the animal died, unless we happen at some time to dig up some teeth. We just don't know when the leopard, lion, lynx and cheetah died out. And as we do not know, we cannot really prove that they are indeed extinct."

On the other hand, we can make intelligent guesses as to how a big cat would adapt to the British countryside and what it would most likely look like. This our author proceeds to do, carefully giving her reasons, and: "To sum up, our imaginary cat would be about the size and build of a leopard; it would be tawny-gold, gold or russet-brown in colour, although if forest-dwelling it could produce a melanistic or black strain. If of nocturnal habit, it could have developed ear tufts." (These last greatly assist in detecting the movement of prey in the dark.) It would also be shy, lurking in wooded areas away from people, a solitary hunter that met with its own kind only for mating. Francis then compares these characteristics with how and where big cats are reported in Britain, and finds a reasonable match – enough to justify her 'fossil' hypothesis. The striped and spotted ones she accounts for as probable juveniles (since lion and puma cubs also exhibit spots and stripes). So she concludes: "Yes, a unique cat could exist in the British Isles... The only question left is not could it, but does it?"

Before answering that question, Francis takes an unexpected detour, first back to her Black Dog-equals-big-black-cat proposal in greater detail, and then, perhaps yet more radically, she suggests that the renowned 'Devil's hoofprints' that made a trail across Devon in February 1855 (see **FT200:29** and Mike Dash's exhaustive account in *Fortean Studies*, Vol. 1, pp.71-150) were actually made by a big cat. Once again, she makes a plausible case, noting in particular precisely how the 'Devil's' prints *could* have been made by a cat on a long trip in search of sustenance in particularly nasty weather. Having made the reader go 'Hmmm' several times over, her final chapter recounts how, working with Steve Joyce in Wales, she succeeded in spotting, and he in photographing, a large black cat at a distance, and a couple of cubs close up.

To mangle a metaphor, one could say this book sets off a lot of hares, not all of which seem to have been very thoroughly chased. But for its originality, it deserves a place on the fortean bookshelf.

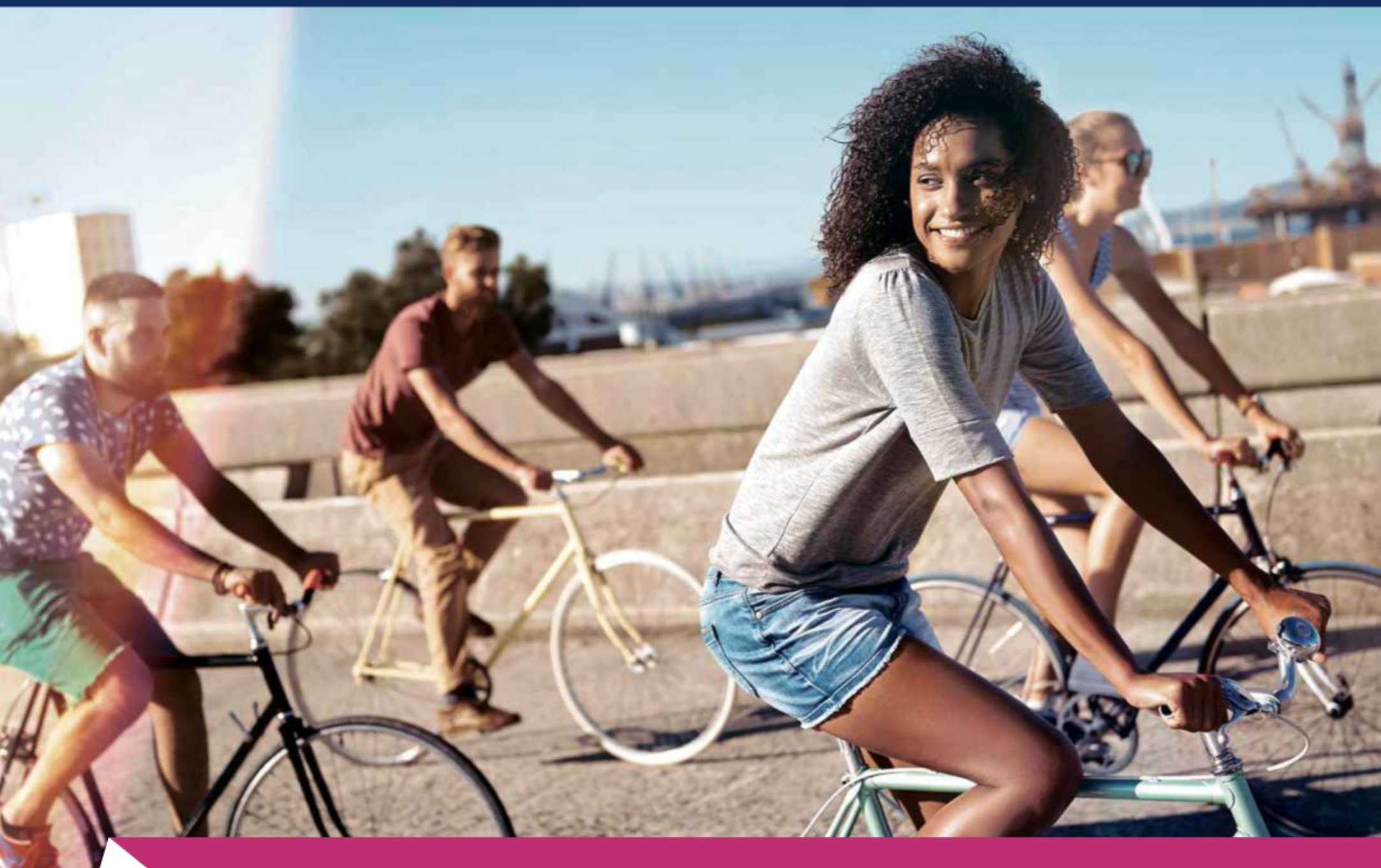
Di Francis, *Cat Country: The Search for the British Big Cat*, David & Charles 1983.

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No summer for the New World Order

TEA KRULOS wonders how our favourite secret societies are coping with a long summer of cancelled events

By now we've come to terms with our favourite festivals, concerts, and sporting events being cancelled because of the pandemic. But what about the Globalist New World Order Deep State Illuminati Secret Rulers of the World? Some conspiracy theorists say that the "powers that be" hoaxed the COVID-19 pandemic for their own nefarious ends, laughing evilly as the "sheeple" sit at home watching "fake news". That means they're free to carry on as they please, right?

As it turns out, it seems that secret society summer get-togethers have fallen apart, too.

The most striking example is the cancellation of the annual "Summer Encampment" at Bohemian Grove, the redwoods retreat for the Bohemian Club, whose members have included the world's most powerful men. The Bohemian Club was founded in San Francisco in 1872 to help foster the arts, but evolved into an organisation mixing entertainment with wealth and power. The Club spends two weeks every July at Bohemian Grove, where they hold a bizarre mock sacrifice – the "Cremation of Care" ceremony – in front of a statue of an owl to kick off a vacation of live music, theatrical performances, recreation and partying, and daily speeches given by members and guests.

This is the first July the Grove will sit empty since the Club started this summer tradition in 1878.

"Major events, including... the Bohemian Grove encampment in Monte Rio, were cancelled," reports *The Press Democrat* in a



piece about July events being axed in Sonoma County, where the newspaper is based and the hidden retreat located.

Another organisation with a long history of generating conspiracy rumours is the "Bilderberg Group", a term referring to attendees of the annual Bilderberg Meeting, which first took place in 1954 to improve relations between the US and Europe. Bilderberg gets its name from the group's first meeting place, the Hotel de Bilderberg in Oosterbeek, the Netherlands. As with Bohemian Grove, the conspiracies have arisen from the idea of a large number of people in positions of power meeting in secrecy: Bilderberg meetings have about 150 invitation-only guests and the press isn't allowed in.

Despite the lore concerning the group's alleged secrecy, they do have a website, where they announced "THE MEETING

2020 IS POSTPONED." More interesting is the site's FAQ, where they address things like not letting media cover their meetings; a press conference on the eve of the meeting was held into the 1990s, when it was cancelled, they say, "due to a lack of interest". Here's another interesting answer on the FAQ, in response to a question asking why criticism from "certain groups" targets the meeting:

"The Bilderberg Meetings have often been the target of anti-globalisation protests and various conspiracy theorists have expressed wild allegations about the purpose of the gatherings. While these claims lack any and all merit, we regret to see that many continue to flourish online and in social media groups."

A similar private group, the Trilateral Commission, also has a reputation for conspiracy. Founded in 1973 by David

Rockefeller, the group meets to work on relations between North America, Europe, and Japan. The commission's website lists events for 2019 – but not 2020.

Members of Skull and Bones, a secret society at Yale, won't be in their "Tomb" house this summer. They'd probably be off on their vacations, anyway, but Yale's website makes it clear that "all in-person, campus-based programming is cancelled for summer 2020."

Skull and Bones is like the junior version of Bohemian Grove; a select few are chosen each year to be "Bonesmen", and are then initiated in a strange ritual. Former Bonesmen include many politicians, corporate leaders, and other people at high levels of power. In 2004, Bonesmen George W Bush and John Kerry ran against each other.

Skull and Bones might not be lurking on the Yale campus, but the club still might make use of its own private island, located in the Saint Lawrence River. The 50-acre Deer Island was established as a retreat and gifted to Skull and Bones sometime around 1949. In the glory days, it was well maintained and had several buildings, tennis courts, and softball fields, but a lack of budget and motivation has left most of the island to fall to ruin, except for a lodge called The Ledges, located on the shore, which the club uses as a party house.

If they're doing any strange secret rituals out there this summer, let's hope they remember to socially distance...

♦ **TEA KRULOS** is the author of



American Madness: The True Story of the Phantom Patriot and How Conspiracy Theories Hijacked American Consciousness (out this month from Feral House) and the "Tea's Weird Week" column at teakrulos.com.

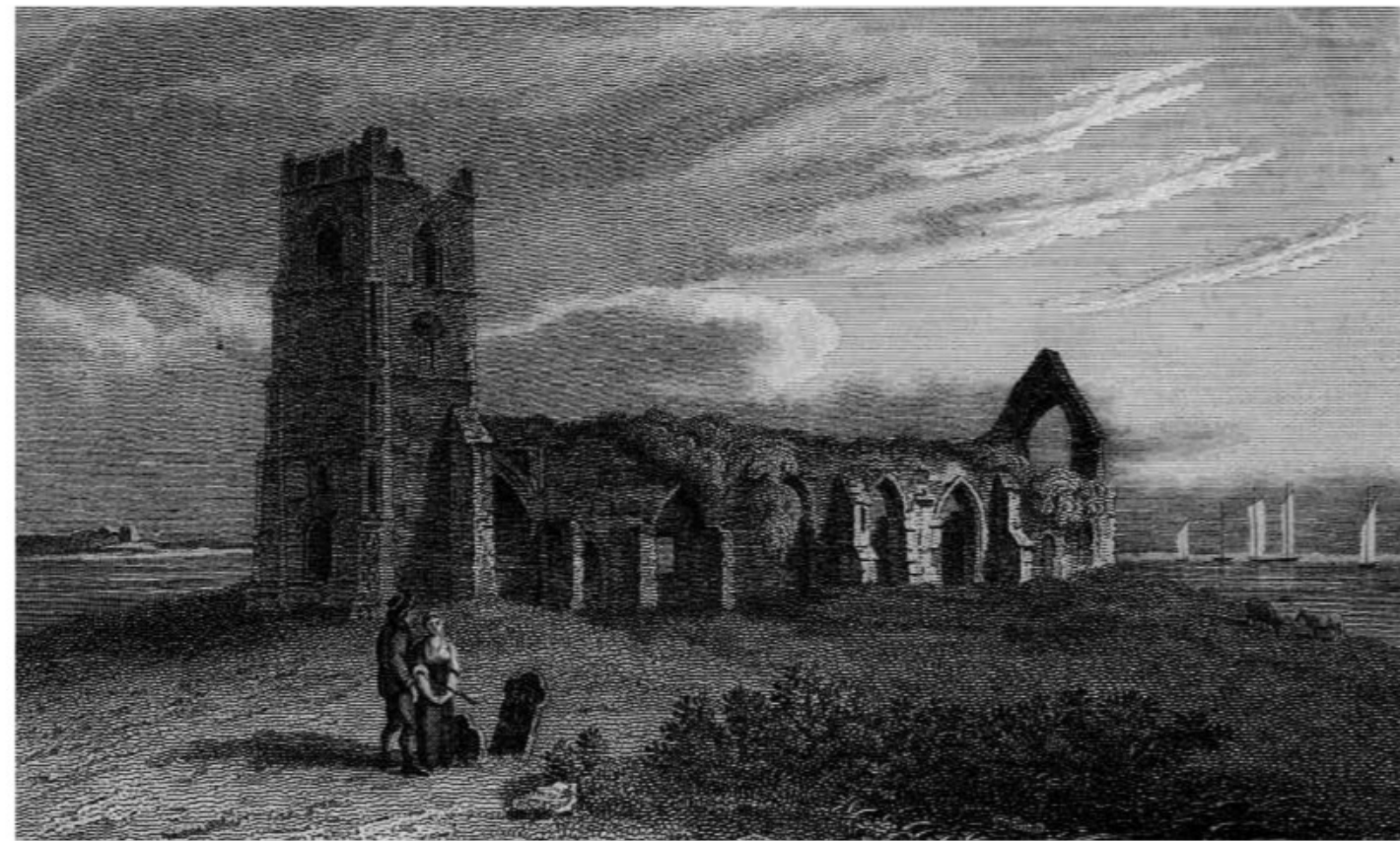
The bells! The bells!

MATT SALUSBURY
listens out for the
sound of underwater
tintinnabulation as he
goes in search of Britain's
sunken bell legends...

Is it true about the bells tolling beneath the waves? It's a question frequently asked by visitors to Dunwich Museum. The legend of the nocturnal phantom bells at Dunwich, though obvious nonsense, is actually among the more plausible of Britain's ghost bell traditions. At least churches actually once stood in Dunwich – which is more than can be said for the locations of many phantom bell legends.

Dunwich on the Suffolk coast was once mediæval England's sixth biggest town – a major port with its own royal shipyard, trading with the Hanseatic League before a thousand years' worth of coastal erosion and three really big storms did for it. It's now a village of just over 100 souls. Stonework from several of the sunken city's dozen churches was hauled up from the bed of the North Sea in dives throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Rowland Parker, author of the definitive history, *Men of Dunwich*, said he'd "never heard any local talk of bells tolling out to sea" as



ABOVE: The ruins of All Saint's Church, Dunwich, in an engraving of 1813. **BELOW:** The beach at Dunwich today.

of 1979. The oldest documentation for the legend dates from 1859, when Master Mariner John Day claimed to have known his position when sailing to Sizewell Bank to the south by the tolling of a submerged bell heard while passing Dunwich. Perhaps Master Day heard a bell on a wreck or wreck buoy.

Some of the churches could have been suddenly inundated, as in the Great Storm of 1286. The antiquarian John Stow visited Dunwich in 1573, describing "remnants of ramparts,

downfallen edifices and tottering noble structures" at the water's edge. But could these church bells have still been intact, underwater in their derelict belfries, rung by the action of the tides 300 years later? Unlikely. As Nigel Pennick points out in *Lost Lands and Sunken Cities*, "every church lost to the sea was destroyed by wave action."

Some Dunwich bells are accounted for. Mediæval parish records include a receipt for the sale of the bells of St Nicholas Church to build a pier to protect

another town church from the inexorable advance of the sea. Other Dunwich churches were demolished as no longer viable, faced with the ever-encroaching waves. The still standing 19th century church of St James's, Dunwich, has a single automated bell that only tolls the hour. But a recent anonymous entry to Dunwich Museum visitors' book records a local man hearing twice "a peel of six chimes" at about 2am on the "very stormy" night of 29 December 2017.

Some other well documented sunken churches off Britain's coasts have phantom bell legends attached. St-Annes-on-the-Sea, Lancashire, has the sunken remains of a mediæval church off the coast, its bells allegedly heard before storms. Also said to warn of tempests are the phantom bells at Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex, whose church – taken by the sea in the 1790s – is now three miles offshore. Shipden, near Cromer in Norfolk, once had a church, on the submerged remains of whose tower the tug *Victoria* was wrecked in 1888. And yes, its bells sometimes sound at night.





MATT SALUSBURY

ABOVE LEFT: Remains of Dunwich churches retrieved from the bed of the North Sea by the Dunwich Dives (1970s-1980s). **ABOVE RIGHT:** This section of a tomb, hauled up in the Dunwich Dives, is believed to be from Dunwich's Templar Church.

Not all verifiable lost churches succumbed to the waves. Between Southwell and Oxton in Nottinghamshire there once stood the settlement of Raleigh – flattened by the East Midlands earthquake of 1185, although not “swallowed up” as legends tell. Local tradition has church bells heard on Christmas Day.

But evidence for an actual church behind phantom bell legends is usually scarce. Some more plausible phantom bell stories come from Cornwall, where bells on sunken ships rather than vanished churches are supposed to ring, such as the bell of the long-lost *Neptune* off St Ives.

Welsh phantom bell legends include one from Llangorse Lake, Powys, in which the bells of a cathedral that stood there before it was flooded now sound on “holy days”. Since the lake was formed by the last Ice Age 10,000 years ago, this is a credibility-stretcher. A similar legend is attached to Bala Lake.

Numerous Welsh legends feature the Devil or his disguised imps stealing bells, then dumping them at sea. They then toll from their new location, warning fishermen as storms approach – as do the bells heard from Whitesand Bay near St David's, Pembrokeshire. The provenance of the phantom bells of Aberdovey, Gwynedd, cannot be traced beyond the Victorian music hall song “The Bells of Aberdovey”.

Phantom bells said to have

He knew his position by the tolling of a submerged bell

been stolen and lost in transit are a common motif. A tale from Bosham on the Sussex coast has a bell stolen by Viking raiders, then loaded onto a longship, which sailed away. When locals rang the “all clear” from other churches, the stolen bell vibrated in unison, capsizing the vessel. The story is probably a 19th century explanation of why Bosham's church has no tenor bell.

In Llanwonno, Glamorgan, the bell was said to have been stolen by “big-eared men of Taff”, who dragged it away on a sledge only to lose it in a river. The story may be an invention explaining odd local place names like Rhyd-y-gloch – ford of the bell.

Divine retribution swallowing up churches whose parishioners blaspheme or “mock God” is another recurring theme. Or bells are lost in transit when a “workman” leading oxen pulling the bells utters a profane oath. One such phantom church bell sounds on Christmas Eve from Bomere Pool in Shrewsbury, although there's no evidence there was ever a church there. Nor is there evidence of a church ever

existing at Bell Hole, in marshes at Tunstall, Norfolk, whose phantom bells send up bubbles as the church sinks towards Hell. Bells transported by ship from Forrabury, Cornwall, were allegedly sunk by the hand of God after a captain ridiculed a priest who crossed himself; they are now said to ring beneath the waves.

An especially tenuous church-destroyed-by-God's-wrath tale comes from Coningsby, Lincolnshire, whose bells supposedly peal on the anniversary of its destruction. A natural rock formation there slightly resembles the rubble of a church.

Mermaids also appear in phantom bell traditions. Every Easter Sunday, a mermaid rings a bell underwater at Rostherne Mere, Cheshire. A near-identical tale has a mermaid ringing a church bell beneath the River Lugg near Marden, Herefordshire.

Bells sound from an allegedly submerged village church at Kenfig Pool near Bridgend, South Wales. While the sea has claimed a nearby castle, there's no proof there was ever a village there. Nor is there any record of a church having stood at Nigg Bay in the Scottish Highlands, from whose waters a bell is said to gently peal.

Recent research into Very Long Period signals detected underwater with a resonance that can sound like “a large bell” suggests these tales may have something to do with undersea

earthquakes (see **FT391:17**), so a rational explanation may yet be forthcoming.

Thanks to Darren Mann of Paranormal Database, which has an excellent collection of accounts at www.paranormaldatabase.com/reports/bells.php

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Dunwich Museum, Dunwich, Suffolk is closed due to COVID-19 at the time of writing.

Entry is by donation; for opening hours, visit www.dunwichmuseum.org.uk

♦ **MATT SALUSBURY** is a regular contributor to Fortean Times and a Trustee and volunteer of Dunwich Museum.

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‘Real or unreal’ is not the question

This is far more than just a study of gods, angels, ghosts, UFOs and aliens, says **Bob Rickard** – it’s a gripping examination of the nature of reality and consciousness

Hidden Universe

An Investigation into Non-Human Intelligences

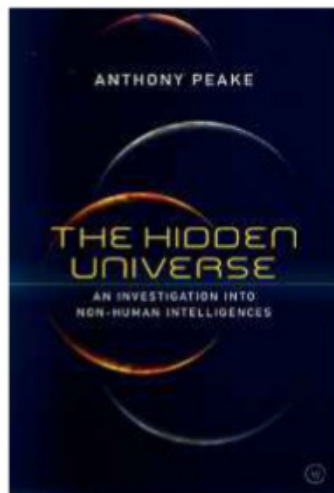
Anthony Peake

Watkins Publishing 2019

Pb, 230pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781786782809

There will come a time when we will look back and see that these studies by Anthony Peake helped create a fresh understanding of our minds and the worlds we create and inhabit through imaginative participation. Quietly, book by book, he is establishing that philosophically important “place to stand”: a place from which we can properly assess the nature of the universe hidden inside ourselves. He is correlating ground-breaking science and ideas with authentic anomalies of our perception and experience. Many have tried this in the past but, in this latest and fascinating instalment, Peake builds upon them, demystifying them in a story that is both gripping and understandable, even to those new to the subject.

His publishers claim this book is “the most comprehensive survey ever made of otherworldly visitors, gods, angels, demons and djinn, hobgoblins, poltergeists and ghosts, UFOs and aliens”. It is so much more than that. Peake shows that these are but a few of the disguises used by what, for convenience, is called “non-human intelligence”. Peake called these entities *egregores*, a collective term for the diverse forms of non-human intelligences, from an old Greek expression meaning “wakeful” or “watchful”.



His previous books studied the different types of consciousness in our divided brains; the nature of “awareness”; and how these “altered states” create different kinds of “realities” including the perceptual anomalies known as lucid dreaming, out-of-the-body (OBE) and near-death (NDE) experiences. *The Hidden Universe* goes much deeper into the nature of “self-referential consciousness” to examine a particular thread: the mystery of the near-universal accounts of the strange magical entities encountered at the periphery of consciousness.

Yes, he discusses encounters with all those “supernatural” entities, but when the differentials are stripped away – or seen as inconsequential – all of them, our sense of self included, seem to be made of the same ethereal stuff. Peake proposes that consciousness, far from being merely a biochemical accident of evolution, is the actual root source of the material universe. At its most basic level, he suggests, everything that seems to be physical has been brought into existence by consciousness; mind is the *prima materia*.

Peake begins his catalogue of examples by describing his elderly mother’s experience of waking one night to see two small big-headed beings peering at her. She knew nothing of ufology’s “grey aliens”, yet her account conforms to the “bedroom visitor” type of encounter. He then moves on to similar narratives triggered by fear, illness, ecstasy or “possession”, including so-called “veridical” OBEs and NDEs; and

Everything that seems to be physical has been brought into existence by consciousness

shared and lucid dreams. He then discusses *entheogens* (drugs that seem to enable contact with “the god within”) being studied by today’s brave psychologists and anthropologists, building on the historical work of pioneers such as John Lilly, Timothy Leary and Terence McKenna (the latter having famously declared: “You get elves, everybody does”).

A detailed example is the work of psychologist Dr David Luke of the University of Greenwich, who experimented on himself with doses of the entheogen DMT. In 2008, Luke summarised his realisation that there was much more to this experience of “other worlds” than suggested in the materialist-rationalist reporting in scholarly journals. Other dosed researchers have reported intelligent beings more diverse and stranger than any in SF or fantasy.

“Sometimes I saw unknown god-like beings, sometimes shape-shifting mischievous imps,” he says. “Beyond the ego-dissolution,” he found “some kind of ontological barrier... as though I was being blocked from whatever lurked beyond these multiple geometric dimensions.” Returning NDEers sometimes report a similar sense of being turned back to their mundane existence from something wonderful that waited out of reach.

We cannot simply dismiss these “entities” as having no “real” existence simply because

they seem more hallucinatory than actual. Their mysterious existence seems tied to the mystery of reality itself. As Luke asks: “How can one really know what is real and what is unreal when both perceptions are presented to consciousness by the same brain?”

Peake himself experienced the “reality” of “a perceptual world beyond my everyday experience”, but in a different way – induced by “Lucia”, an experimental “hypnagogic light” device created by two Austrians, psychologist Dr Engelbert Winkler and neurologist Dr Dirk Proeckl, that “totally changed my understanding of what ‘reality’ truly is”, encouraging him to research OBE states. Peake is unravelling this complex human tapestry of being, showing us its warp and weft and, as a good fortean would, invites us to engage with the puzzle.

Peake demonstrates that we need a better definition of “reality” than that given by our dictionaries’ vague offering: a “state of being real”. Peake’s survey of other attempts – from Plato’s famous allegory of shadows in the cave to modern theories of complex brain chemistry – is much more useful, mindful that these entities are not perceived in the usual way, but are experienced more like vivid dreams presented in “interior” narratives.

It is all very deep and heady stuff, but written so clearly that no one who has ever wondered about the mysteries of being need be daunted or baffled by the subject’s complexity. If you are interested in an intelligent discussion about the nature of “reality” and its relationship with consciousness, do not miss Peake’s latest. It is, after all, about *you*.

★★★★★

SETI dreams

The evidence for UFOs (whatever they might or might not be) is given short shrift

Extraterrestrials

Wade Roush

MIT Press 2020

Pb, 221pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780262538435

If for some reason or another you feel the need to consume a history of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) – the effort to contact aliens over vast cosmic distances via radio telescopes and other instruments – *Extraterrestrials* is the book you want to read.

It's crisply informative and briskly written, and it's short and therefore won't take up much of your time. You'll even learn some real astronomy. And towards the end it offers up a litany of riveting conjectures rife for science fiction treatment.

Meanwhile, if there is not much that I'm sure of, one thing is that SETI, which has sputtered along since the late 1950s, hasn't caught a whiff of space-alien scent, and I am confident it will not have done so by the time you read these words. It's arguable, moreover, that this will apply over the lifetime of everyone present, in the improbable eventuality that SETI lives on decades from now.

Naturally, there will be continuing rationalisations, all based on the maxim "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence". Ironically, that was an expression favoured by the flamboyant ufologist/Roswell-crash advocate Stanton T Friedman (a nuclear physicist in his distant past), who was roundly ridiculed for his rote recitation of that sentiment.

SETI scientists, of course, are more respectably bourgeois than unwashed heretics. Misguided as he was – much of Friedman's career was devoted

to declaring dry wells to be overflowing – in his lucid moments he argued from a body of actual evidence. When he wasn't chasing the sorts of phantasms he fashioned out of an ironclad conviction that he could not possibly be mistaken – a behavioural affliction he shared with those who held to exactly the opposite certainty regarding UFO reports – he, like some of his more restrained colleagues, came upon the occasional genuinely, even deeply, puzzling report.

In *Extraterrestrials* Wade Roush does not engage with that evidence (unlike fellow SETI chronicler Edward Ashpole in *Signatures of Life* (2013), which is brimming with original, thought-provoking insights). Instead, he treats it as if it weren't there.

One doesn't have to surmise that UFOs are extrasolar spacecraft (a proposition on which I, author/editor of the multi-volume, academically orientated *UFO Encyclopedia: The Phenomenon from the Beginning* [1990-2018], remain agnostic) to concede that non-trivial evidence – intriguingly anomalous, but whose significance may have to await future science – is hardly absent, if you can be bothered to look for it. It certainly deserves better than short shrift.

But if short shrift suits you, grasp tight to SETI dreams and your copy of *Extraterrestrials*, and be relieved that they keep potentially meddlesome space folk far, far away.

Immerse yourself, too, in the SF novels and films that so far comprise SETI's one undisputed legacy.

Jerome Clark

★ ★ ★



Escaping from Eden

Does Genesis teach that the human race was created by God or engineered by ETs?

Paul Wallis

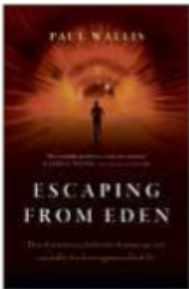
Axis Mundi Books 2020

Pb, 154pp, £8.99, ISBN 9781789043877

This is a curious throwback to the late 1960s and 1970s with their flurry of "God was an astronaut" bestsellers. The author is a clergyman who was laid up in traction for several months with a leg injury, a period of reflection and something of a crisis of faith that resulted in this book. He ponders the cruelty of the Old Testament God, and wonders at the contrast between this stern and seemingly pitiless deity and the New Testament's God of Love. These doubts lead him towards a form of Marcionite heresy, in which the OT is dismissed, and only the New is valued as the authentic Word of God.

In its opening chapters, there are hints that this book will be offering a newer and more credible thesis than that of von Däniken and his ilk. Wallis displays an awareness and understanding of OT authorship debates: the E (Elohism), J (Yahwist) and P (Priestly) texts of which the Book of Genesis is composed. However, his understanding of biblical Hebrew appears limited; *elohim* is indeed a plural noun and may reasonably be translated as "gods" – Deuteronomy 5:7 ("Thou shalt have none other gods before me"). However, in other contexts – such as Genesis 1:1 ("In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth") – it may denote a singular God. Although here the form is plural, the referent is singular – the verb translated as "created" is singular in the original Hebrew.

Although aware that Genesis contains elements of Canaanite, Babylonian and Sumerian myth, Wallis oddly takes these myths literally, as historical accounts of mankind's earliest beginnings. It is from these shaky foundations that he presents us with the familiar thesis that humanity was created and taught by extraterrestrial beings. He refers to these beings as the "Powerful



Ones", his preferred translation of *elohim*.

Half way in, the book takes a more disappointing turn when various old chestnuts are uncritically rehashed – the Nazca lines; the sarcophagus of Mayan ruler Pakal the Great (supposedly depicted as an astronaut); the iron Mehrauli pillar at Delhi, etc. Wallis is seemingly unaware that such "anomalous" artefacts have long been disproved as evidence for the ancients having knowledge of advanced technology, or for an advanced alien race being responsible for accelerating the development of human civilisation.

The first few chapters' grasp, albeit flawed, of biblical Hebrew, and their competent discussion of Origen and Marcion led me to expect something more persuasive than von Däniken-like 1970s retro fare. In the end, the author emerges with healed leg, renewed belief and a completed manuscript from which this book emerged – but this reader was not convinced.

Peter Ramidge

★ ★

Breaking Open

Finding a Way Through Spiritual Emergency

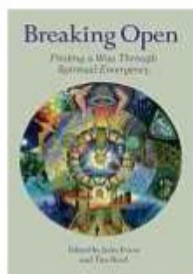
ed. Jules Evans & Tim Read

Aeon Books 2020

Pb, 220pp, £16, ISBN 9781912807697

What's the difference between a mystical experience and a psychotic episode? *Breaking Open* brings together 14 life-changing experiences that could be described as either – or, better perhaps, neither. Psychosis implies a mental problem that needs to be fixed; mystical experience a single moment of revelation. These first-person narratives, by contrast, describe messy, protracted, often nightmarish encounters with non-ordinary reality that their subjects eventually came to regard as necessary steps towards a more stable and happier life.

Several of the writers here were referred to mental health services at some point, and many describe behaviours that psychiatrists would recognise as symptoms of a manic or psychotic disorder: periods of sustained excitement during which they lost all interest in food or sleep, and became convinced they had been



singled out for special or divine knowledge. But psychiatrists, in the words of one contributor, “only want to talk about flattening, deadening concepts like projection, dissociation and psychosis”. In searching for deeper meanings, the subjects are on their own. What can be learned from the experience of dissolving into a ball of light, or falling through a hatch into an alternate universe, or seeing the real world suddenly exposed as a flimsy stage set? The best therapy, it seems, often comes not from medical professionals but from people who have undergone a similar journey.

Across these highly individual accounts, common themes emerge. Many of the writers have childhood traumas in their background; most are chasing spiritual enlightenment or adventure, following paths that range from psychedelics to eastern religions to evangelical Christianity. Often the initial crisis features fortean phenomena such as out-of-body experiences, electrical glitches, poltergeist activity, bizarre coincidences and uncanny premonitions.

Much depends on how these experiences are framed, and the editors use the term “spiritual emergency”, coined by the pioneer of LSD psychotherapy Stanislav Grof, to undercut the binary choice between psychosis and enlightenment. Most of the writers here find their resolution through Jungian therapy, Joseph Campbell’s archetypal hero’s journey or Grof’s holotropic breathwork, and several now work as therapists in these fields.

Several were also able to draw on resources not available to most people in their situation, taking extended time out from their normal lives or travelling around the world to integrate their experiences. As the editors acknowledge, their sample is probably unrepresentative of the larger cohort who undergo such experiences.

The difficulty in making sense of such reality-shattering experiences is compounded by our social norms, within which both madness and religious experience are regarded as abnormal and frightening. For many of the

contributors their crises were a protracted source of shame and stigma, and most are making them public for the first time here.

In the grip of spiritual emergencies, subjects typically feel that the Universe has chosen them for a world-changing purpose. In their wake, it feels like a greater achievement just to be normal. As one puts it, “I am content to try to be a human, to try to be kinder to myself and others. That is enough for this life.”

Mike Jay

★★★★

The Man who Invented the Aztec Crystal Skulls

The Adventures of Eugène Boban

Jane MacLaren Walsh & Brett Topping

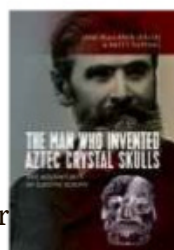
Berghahn Books 2020

Pb, 332pp, £15.95, ISBN 9781789204780

These days, trying to donate artefacts to a national museum is difficult, but six generations back museums vied with each other to buy eye-catching collections, the bigger and more exotic the better. Eugène Boban was their perfect “go-to” man: he was probably the world’s leading expert on Central American Pre-Colombian artefacts, and for decades had created (from his own excavations), bought and sold collections. He was a serious self-taught linguist and scholar who could spot a fake from across the room – especially those he was selling (they were the spectacular ones).

This truly engaging and well-illustrated book is less about the rock crystal skulls than the cover might suggest. The smaller crania were not intentional fakes but probably “renaissance ecclesiastical memento mori”. However, as he later admitted, the life-size ones (those that since the 1950s have gained mystical powers and notoriety) were especially created for Boban (for money or mischief) to sell to discerning collectors; these eventually became prize exhibits in national museums.

Instead the book relates the account of a survivor, unharmed by the Californian gold rush, the rash of mid to late 19th-century French and Mexican unrest and civil



wars, indeed even the French-Mexican war (Boban was equally happy to sell ancient *objets de vertu* to Emperor Maximilian and to his later executioners).

Late in life he co-created a 600-page *catalogue raisonné* of Mexican pre-Colombian codices and manuscripts (it remains an internationally important primary source), and should better be remembered for that, than his pretty (and expensive) baubles.

This is a most satisfying biography/social history; it is scholarship at its most entrancing and enlightening. It should be read and reread.

Rob Ixer

★★★★★

Becoming Wild

How Animals Learn to be Animals

Carl Safina

One World Publications 2020

Hb, 384pp, £18.99, ISBN 9781786077240

“Culture,” Safina argues in his accessible new book, is “a form of inheritance” that increases your chances of surviving to pass your genes on to the next generation. But while you get your genes from your biological parents, you get your culture from anyone in your social group. We all eat. So that, Safina points out, isn’t culture. It’s behaviour. But whether we eat with chopsticks or a knife and fork is cultural. Humans don’t have a monopoly on culture, which creates “group identity, conformity, unity – and divisions” throughout the animal kingdom. Many animals learn from their elders about accessing food and water, finding a mate and being part of a group within a species. (For recent fortean discussions about species see **FT382:27**, **FT385:71** and **FT387:74**). Differences in customs, traditions and practices allow groups to “fine tune” behaviour to meet the particular challenges imposed by the environment. Importantly, cultural adaptations are more responsive, flexible and rapid than waiting for genetics to catch up. As Safina points out “culture can lead where genes must follow and adapt”.

He illustrates his core ideas by focusing on whales, macaws and chimpanzees, and offers a smorgasbord of compelling details that should appeal to any

fortean. Sperm whale sonar, for example, is the most powerful blast of focused sound made by a living organism, reaching some 200 decibels. But there’s more to whale song than naked power. Sperm whales use variations in song to differentiate families and larger groups called clans. Baby sperm whales learn the whale song of their family and clan.

Parrots have a similar brain-to-body ratio as primates and can even engage in psittacine economics. Macaws and an African Grey Parrot learnt to take a non-edible token instead of food. They then traded the token for food they preferred. The birds, Safina writes, “understood delayed gratification and the value of currency” and performed as well on this test as chimpanzees.

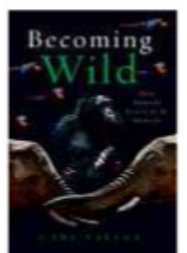
Safina also makes an intriguing suggestion that culture might lead to new species. Biologists believe that geographical barriers lead to a species dividing into separate populations. Over time, challenges imposed by the different ecological niches select for adaptations that eventually become new species: Darwin’s finches in the Galapagos archipelago offer the classic example.

He argues that certain females within a species may choose their mate based on cultural preferences. Over time, this could engender a common identity and avoidance of other groups. The cultural differences, he suggests, could form barriers between groups that lead to new species. Safina points out, for example, that some African lakes contain numerous species of fish called cichlid. But the lakes lack geographical barriers and, possibly, cultural differences resulted in the various species.

Becoming Wild could easily become a television series. After all, whales, macaws and chimpanzees are among the most photogenic fauna. The tone and level would engage a prime-time television audience. In the meantime, Safina suggests that the “importance of culture in the other-than-human world has been almost entirely missed.” *Becoming Wild* goes a long way to redressing the balance.

Mark Greener

★★★★



Templars in America?

A sound and critical examination of the case for the Westford Knight and Henry Sinclair’s voyage – with or without the Ark of the Covenant

The Westford Knight and Henry Sinclair

Evidence of a 14th-Century Scottish Voyage to North America

David Goudsward

McFarland 2020

Pb, 307pp, £32.27, ISBN 9781476678665

European discovery of the American continent probably occurred around AD 1000. Archaeologists have uncovered a number of archaeological sites that suggest Scandinavians explored what is now eastern Canada and north-eastern United States as early as 1398.

Among the most intriguing of these is the Westford Knight, a rock carving located in Westford, Massachusetts, which appears to depict a European armoured figure clasp ing a sword and shield. In this new updated edition of *The Westford Knight and Henry Sinclair*, researcher David Goudsward comprehensively addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence.

The carving – which may simply be natural weathering of a rock face and therefore potentially nothing more than pareidolia – was at first believed to be carved by Native Americans, and its subsequent reinterpretation as evidence of a pre-Columbian European incursion into the interior of the North American continent relies greatly on conjecture, inference, and circumstantial evidence.

This reassessment began when it was rediscovered in 1954 by Frank Glynn, a Connecticut-based amateur archaeologist. To Glynn, the figure in the carving appears to wear a uniform and armour similar to those worn by mediæval Scottish knights. Glynn interpreted markings on this

supposed “shield” to be similar to the family crest of the Gunn clan of northern Scotland.

The theories concerning the Westford Knight’s provenance, which Goudsward almost wholly discounts, begin with Glynn’s identification of the Gunn crest. Sir James Gunn, a soldier of fortune, was a close friend of Henry Sinclair, and both were presumed to be members of the Knights Templar. When, in 1307, the French king disbanded the Templar order and ordered them killed and their assets seized, the knights who escaped execution reputedly disappeared along with

their treasure, said to include the Holy Grail and the Ark of the Covenant.

It is theorised that Gunn and Sinclair escaped with the Templar treasure to the Americas in 1398 or 1399; they are believed by some to have hidden their treasure there, most notoriously on Oak Island, site of the

famous money pit. There, Sinclair is said to have met with the local Mi’kmaq tribe, who told him of riches to be found further south, which brought Sinclair to Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Interestingly, the Mi’kmaq legend of Glooscap, who shares many similarities with Sinclair, appears in tribal history around the same time as their alleged meeting, and various tribal carvings appear to approximate Templar crosses.

Also during this expedition, Sinclair apparently met up with an Italian explorer, Niccolo Zeno. A subsequent history, the Zeno Narrative, appeared in the late 16th century, allegedly based on letters between Zeno and his brother. (Goudsward here includes not one but two English translations of the Narrative.) A hoax, the Narrative describes the exploration of possibly Newfoundland or Nova Scotia, using ancient maps and meetings

with natives who share similarities with certain eastern Native American tribes.

Goudsward admirably navigates various narratives and admirably separates fact from fiction. To counter the scant evidence for the identification of the Westford carving as a remnant of the Sinclair expedition, Goudsward provides a thorough study of the Sinclair genealogy and the potential relationship between the Westford Knight and the Gunn clan, as well as an enlightening analysis of the Zeno Narrative and the possible identification of Sinclair as the legendary Glooscap.

In later chapters, Goudsward casts his doubt upon Rhode Island’s Newport Tower and the “Boat Stone” carving of Westford as possible additional evidence of the southern extent of Sinclair’s pre-Columbian exploration of the Americas.

Goudsward’s competent and responsible scholarship and research is evident throughout: he makes full use of the historical record and, despite some minor problems with construction and somewhat workmanlike prose, his book remains the most authoritative, persuasive and above all credible study of this altogether compelling historical mystery, too often shrouded in sensationalistic, sloppy, semi-fictional speculation that has regrettably resulted in its unfortunate dismissal by otherwise cautious historians.

Goudsward presents his arguments in a critical framework that draws on historical, political, geological and social contexts. He provides dozens of helpful photographs and illustrations, and his endnotes and bibliography are at least as informative as the main text. This is a noteworthy example of competent and cautious scholarship.

Eric Hoffmann
★★★★

Telling The Bees and Other Customs

The Folklore of Rural Crafts

Mark Norman

History Press 2020

Hb, 189pp, £12, ISBN 9780750992152

Mark Norman is a folklorist and podcaster based in Devon. He is behind “The Folklore Podcast”, which has been running since 2016. *Telling the Bees & Other Customs* is an excellent introduction to the folklore around some of the oldest crafts practised by humanity.

The folklore, mythology and history surrounding the crafts of beekeepers, blacksmiths, brewers, bakers, millers, knitters, sewers and weavers around the world are revealed in a conversational and accessible way. The book gives us an

insight into the everyday life and beliefs about these vital rural practices. Common superstitions and beliefs across trades are discussed

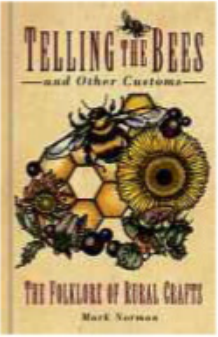
over the course of the book making for a rewarding read. If you are interested in the cultural history of beer, the chapter on beer and brewing alone makes this worth buying. Hangover lore is covered extensively; onions and steak figure greatly. Handy advice indeed.

Each chapter contains many little gems of folklore, making for a fun read. In “Wool, Thread and Cloth” the concept of Scandinavian Sun goddesses spinning sunbeams on a Sun wheel was explored. I found this particularly interesting as most Sun deities are male, and the Sun wheel is commonly associated with a Sun chariot.

“Blacksmiths and Metalworking” carries details on the horseshoe: where it should be hung heels up to keep the luck in, and heels down to let the luck pour out.

A book this good would have benefited from an index. If you are interested in folklore, this is a stimulating read for those who are familiar with the subject, and it’s written so well as to be really enjoyable for those new to it.

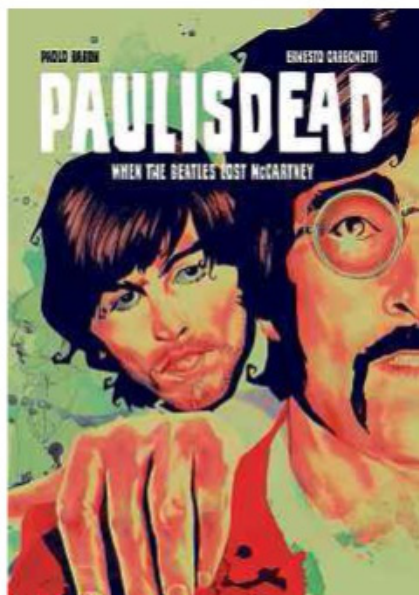
George Hoyle
★★★★





COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

STEVE TOASE PRESENTS HIS LATEST PICKS FROM THE WORLD OF SEQUENTIAL ART



Paul is Dead

Paolo Baron, Ernesto Carbonetti
Image Comics, 2020
Pb, 128pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781534316294

Many comics touch on *fortean* – aliens, strange phenomena, ghosts and so on are frequent plot elements – but *Paul is Dead* is slightly different in that its subject is solid *fortean* all the way through. The conspiracy theory surrounding Paul McCartney will be familiar to most readers (see **FT384-30-37**): that the real Paul McCartney died in a 1966 car crash, and was replaced by a lookalike, a situation hinted at via lyrics and other media.

First appearing in Italian as *Chiedi a John. Quando i Beatles persero Paul*, *Paul is Dead* has now been published in English for the first time by Image Comics, with a translation by Adrian Nathan West.

Following a short black and white prologue, the story proper starts with Brian Epstein and John Lennon talking on a roof, before the narrative flips backwards and forwards in time to explore one of the most famous conspiracy theories about arguably the world's most famous band. The artwork captures the psychedelic character of the band at the time, with vibrant use of colour. Figures created from negative space, lack of borders around panels, and silhouettes project both the unreality of fame, and the folklore surrounding the band in 1966. And the comic's conclusion about McCartney's 'disappearance'? You'll have to read for yourself. You might agree with how the

story ends or you might not, but there's no doubt that this is a beautiful way to retell one of the most famous conspiracy theories of the 1960s.

Blood Moon

P M Buchan, John Pearson, Aditya Bidikar
and Hannah Means-Shannon
<https://bloodmooncomic.com/>



Blood Moon begins at the Trenance Cider Festival where former Christian musician Owen Fitzwilliam is taking to the stage for the first time since going solo and starting to sing "for the other side". During the night a tragic accident happens, and with the ripples of that spreading through the magic-infused community, Owen starts to look for vengeance.

The folk horror elements here (witches, magic, and the occult), are well integrated, both into the community and the storytelling. So far, I've read the first chapter, but there is a lot of power here. This is helped by the distinctive artwork, at once almost photo-realist and otherworldly. Sometimes as pale as an over-exposed photo, the panels are decorated with extra details, like scratched out eyes to show drunkenness or boxes around characters to isolate them from the conversation. Tarot cards tip across the page, and expressions are captured in negative. This is honestly one of the most beautiful comics I've seen in a while; I'm looking forward to Chapter 2.

The Goblin

Ethan M Aldridge
<https://gumroad.com/ethanmaldridge#MGqWde>



The Goblin is a lovely short comic about where we find beauty in the world –although it also tackles themes of cruelty, ignorance and identity. The relationship between good and evil, and how that manifests, lies at the heart of this black-and-white comic, illustrated and writ-

ten by Ethan M Aldridge. Although the eponymous character never speaks, Ethan manages to invest him with personality, and contrasts that with the other more human and more verbose characters. Well worth downloading.

Once & Future

Kieron Gillen, Dan Moya
Boom Studios, 2020

Pb, 160pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781684154913



The title *Once & Future* is a big signpost that this comic is going to touch on Arthurian myth, yet as anyone who has

followed Kieron Gillen's career has come to expect, there is much more going on here. *Once & Future* explores the influence of stories and myth, the intractable knots ideas of purity and nationalism tie themselves into, and the relationships between different generations of a family.

When an archaeological excavation uncovers an early mediæval scabbard, a sequence of events is triggered, taking Duncan out of his quiet day-to-day into a world that has been hidden from him all his life. At the heart of *Once & Future* is a fast-paced quest story, and at the heart of that is the relationship between Duncan and his Gran, Bridgette. For me, Gran is the star of this story. Complex, nuanced, sharp, yet not invincible (on several occasions her age slows her down), she is particularly well written and demonstrates that there is space in comics for older protagonists. There is a lot of humour here, and the dialogue is so well done that it sparks, particularly the conversations between Duncan and Bridgette.

Dan Mora's artwork is an integral part of the storytelling. Characters like Bridgette succeed or fail on the way their facial expressions are portrayed, because expression carries so much personality, and here Mora has managed to cram in plenty of that; even the minor characters in the nursing home look as if they have their own stories to

tell. Also, I must mention Tamra Bonvillain's colours, with a striking palette of purples, pinks and greens carrying the story forward.

I'd recommend this to anyone who wants a nuanced comic about myth, or who just wants a rollicking adventure story. Either way, this is well worth your time.

Best of 2000AD

Rebellion Publishing, 2020
Pb, 100pp, \$4.99



To publish a 'Best Of' series (this is the first of 12) for a weekly comic with a 40-year history must be a daunting task.

You want to attract new readers who may not know the comic's long-established culture, but in a single issue there's no way to bring them completely up to speed with those complex intertwining storylines that extend right back to the Seventies, especially where some of the most celebrated stories stretch over multiple issues.

Best Of 2000AD takes a very interesting approach. Each story chosen captures the spirit of *2000AD*, while not falling into the trap of being stereotypical. For example, "Judge Dredd – Terror" is very clearly a Mega City One tale, but choosing a story with Colin MacNeil's sweeping more impressionist artwork gives a sense of the breadth of illustration there has always been in the comic.

The next two stories, "Jaegir Strigoi" and "The Ballad of Halo Jones", both use language that is story-specific, but grounded enough in the everyday to be familiar, whereas "Brink" features the type of visual device that only really works in comics to 'translate' the unfamiliar. It's also satisfying to see a single page one-shot included, something *2000AD* has always done particularly well.

Best of 2000AD is clearly aimed at the new reader, but may well attract collectors with the series of specially commissioned covers, the first one by Jamie McKelvie.

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD, UK.

Pandora's Gogglebox

Nigel Kneale's amazingly prescient satire on the relationship between producers and consumers of television remains a masterpiece of dystopian science fiction – and it's back as an extra-laden DVD



The Year of the Sex Olympics

Dir Michael Elliot, UK 1968
BFI, £14.99 (DVD)

The Year of the Sex Olympics was an astonishing TV drama when it was first aired in 1968. It still is. Although, like a lot of Sixties TV, it's a bit clunky in places, it remains a dystopian masterpiece. It was also remarkably prescient, foretelling the mindless tat that is much of today's "reality TV" and its disturbing side-effects on three groups: the physical and emotional harm that can be caused to participants, the numbing of the audience, and the apparent amorality of TV producers only concerned with ever-higher viewing figures.

The year itself is unstated, but it's a fairly near future. Writer Nigel Kneale – best known for the *Quatermass* dramas, *The Stone Tape*, *Beasts* and other SF/horror programmes – had written the first TV adaptation of Orwell's *1984* back in 1954; the bleakness and relentless inevitability of its outcome had stayed with him.

Humanity (or at least Britain) is divided into two groups of people, high-drive and low-drive. The former produce TV programmes which keep the

"It's just what the world needed. Just to call a big halt. No more progress."

latter subdued: "Yeah, still 200 of 'em to each of us in Output," says programme producer Nat Mender (Tony Vogel). "Most of 'em got no work to do. All autoed for 'em. Just sit. Dead by 35." The first rule of "apathy control", he says, is "Keep cool. Cool the audience. Cool the world." His boss, Coordinator Ugo Priest (Leonard Rossiter) explains: "It's what the world needed. Just to call a big halt. No more progress. It was done kindly. Not by lasering foetuses or chemical conditioning, electrodes – no, no, none of that... just by gentle discouragement."

Priest explains to Nat how we got there from here. The big breakthrough was: "They found that if they screened everything, and screened it real king-style, then basically the audience would make do with that, in place of the real thing. Take all experiences secondhand, just sit watching calmly and quietly." The motto is "Watch, not do." A selection of the glass-eyed audience are

carefully monitored for real-time feedback: today's Gogglebox, without the conversation.

The Sex Olympics has couples competing with each other to an over-excited commentary and canned applause; another programme is the Hungry Angry Show, with two obese men throwing food at each other and grunting. "Put 'em off food, put 'em off sex," says Nat. "They gotta feel, 'I cannot do like that, not even try.' Sex is not to do. Sex is to watch. That's what they gotta feel. So they watch."

But the lives of the high-drives are just as programmed as the low-drives. Sex has become separated from relationships. Nat is unusual in being selected to have a child with his former partner Deanie (Suzanne Neve) some years ago, and is still keeping in touch with her despite 40 or more partners since then. Deanie's current sex-partner is an artist working in Art Sex, designing drapes, frustrated because he wants to create real art, disturbing art that expresses raw emotions and tension – "I want 'em to hurt" – but he's not allowed to. In desperation he sneaks some of his art into Nat's show, traumatising viewers – but when security staff try to stop him and he falls to his death on live TV the audience absolutely love it. "They say 'It not happen to me,' so they glad, so they laugh," says Nat. "Look at those ratings! Toppest in six months," says Priest.

But how can they get this reaction again? "Suppose you got just a few people to live like old days, and watch them, to make a show," suggests Nat. They would have to fend for themselves, make or catch their own food, with no help at all; they might even get sick and die. That would be the show. "We see you all the time, but you not see us," says Priest.

The first half of the drama is all set in the TV studios; in the

second, Nat, Deanie and their nine-year-old daughter are taken to a prepared cottage on a wild island and left to get on with it. The more that goes wrong, the more the voyeuristic audience of 'The Live-Life Show' love it. "They say 'Not happen to me', so they laugh."

Inevitably there's tragedy, violence, horror. But what is most disturbing is the delighted reaction of the TV audience, and worse, of Nat's former assistant Lasar Opie (a young Brian Cox), now the show's producer: "I was right. The audience, they can take tension, even want it, so long it not happen to them. Sadness, worry, pain, fright. I was right."

Big Brother, *Love Island*, *I'm a Celebrity*, *Naked Attraction*... all have their roots in *The Year of the Sex Olympics*.

The SF trimmings all stand the test of time. Nat is constantly being interrupted by Deanie calling him on his wrist phone; nipple-ended "brighteners" are closer to vapes than to cigarettes; Nat's current partner has a great experience with a "tickler" while they're having sex. But most profound is the debased language they speak, almost a forerunner of text-speak.

The extras are a feast in themselves: a commentary by Brian Cox, a 71-minute audio interview with Kneale from 2000, a short intro to an earlier release of *Sex Olympics* by Kim Newman, a look at the original costume designs – and delightfully, a half-hour film from 1979, *Le Pétomane*, starring Leonard Rossiter as the professional flatulist. The one thing the BFI couldn't do was restore the play's original psychedelic swirls of colour and gold-painted faces; the videotape was wiped and reused, leaving only the b&w telerecording. It's still enough to chill.

David V Barrett





Buñuel in the Labyrinth of Turtles

Dir Salvador Simó, Spain 2018
Streaming on BFI Player

This Oscar-nominated animated feature tells the story of the making of Luis Buñuel's 1933 documentary *Las Hurdes* ('Land without Bread'), about a remote and desperately poor region of Spain. That sounds pretty dry but it really isn't: it's an extraordinary story, with Buñuel and his skeleton crew discovering a lost world where the people and culture are completely alien. Buñuel, one of the great Surrealists, aimed to show that these people were as much a part of Spain as anyone, and that the squalor and poverty in which they lived reflected badly not on them but on the whole country. Sometimes heart-breaking, frequently very funny, and always human, this unusual film is well worth your time.

Daniel King



White Fire

Dir Jean-Marie Pallardy, France/US/Turkey 1984
Arrow Video, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

Although Kat Ellinger, in her excellent commentary, gamely makes a case for taking *White Fire* seriously, I'm not buying it: this is a gloriously bonkers exploiter. Helmed by softcore porn director Jean-Marie Pallardy (*Erotic Diary of a Lumberjack*), it tells the story of brother and sister Bo and Inga (Robert Ginty and Belinda Mayne), who plan to steal a legendary diamond with deadly powers from an evil mining company. Starting with a bizarre flashback-cum-prologue in which the young siblings' parents are murdered by mysterious soldiers, it transforms into an incomprehensible heist movie and then a jaw-droppingly incestuous take on *Vertigo*. Shot in and around Istanbul in the days when Turkish manhood was still proudly moustachioed, bare-chested and medallion-wearing, this nicely restored trash classic also boasts gratuitous nudity, ham-fisted gore effects and an unforgettable Eighties theme song.

David Sutton



THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

Death Ship

Dir Roger Corman, US 1963
Second Sight Films, £23.99 (Ltd edition Blu-ray)

The Woman in Black

Dir Tobe Hooper, US 1979
Warner Bros, £7.99 (Blu-ray)

Films that feature extreme hauntings often share a key logical weakness: the characters *stay* in the haunted location. Yet if they really wanted to, they could just do a 'Lutz' and up and leave. But what if it's impossible to escape? This month we have two ghost movies that fix this logical quirk by simply trapping their characters with the terror.

In low-budget 1980 shocker *Death Ship*, a 'luxury' cruise liner (filmed in what looks like a hotel function room) collides with a mysterious black freighter and sinks (cue stock footage from the 1960s film *The Last Voyage*). Everybody dies, save a handful of survivors floating on a makeshift raft. When the spooky black ship turns up again they have no choice but to board it – but they should have stayed on the raft! Not only is it a haunted ship, it's a haunted *Nazi* ship, helmed by a Hitler-loving poltergeist that plays German propaganda films on an old projector and mashes up people in its gears. It's fun (and fitting) to have disaster movie icon George Kennedy in the cast. Usually known for playing kindly blue collar heroes, his turn as a Cruise ship captain possessed by the spirit of a Nazi is quite the departure.

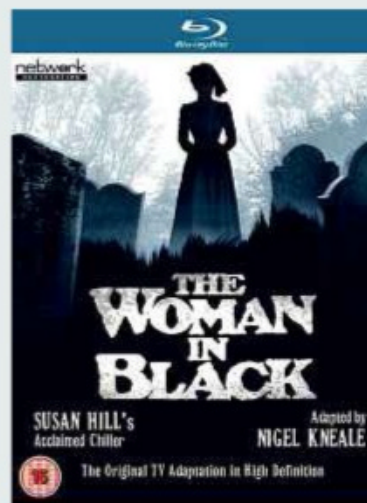
With its mix of eerie dread and occasional nasty gore, *Death Ship* is well worth a look, especially when Nucleus films offer it in such a nice



To think that a nation watched this morose and scary television production on Christmas Eve...

package full of insightful extras. And for those of us used to seeing this on VHS (it was a video hit back in 1983), this crisp new print feels like a maiden voyage.

The victim in our next entry is similarly hemmed in by water, only this time he's on an island, the causeway back to the mainland flooded by the tide. Yes,



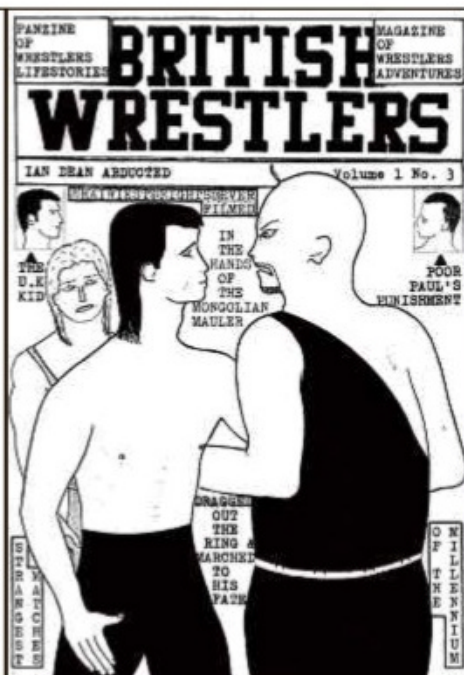
it's Susan Hill's chiller *The Woman in Black*, in which a solicitor has to spend a week in a seaside town settling the estate of a friendless old widow.

This isn't the well-known Daniel Radcliffe version or the scary stage adaptation, it's the long-awaited re-release of the 1989 ITV production. And darn scary it is too. Yes, the film captures the ominous dread the story requires, but the scenes that feature the ghost herself are, I cannot lie, nightmare-inducing. Not everyone shares my opinion; I showed a few key scenes to my 12-year-old daughter and she laughed: "She looks like she's on drugs." But my heart was racing – particularly in the famous bedroom scene, which is as relentless a moment of terror as you'll get in all TV. Nigel Kneale's script may have been written in a mere 10 days, but it's a masterclass. As when the solicitor offers chilling lines about his ghostly encounters: "She wasn't just looking... she was *hating*." Yet Kneale isn't the only key to success here. The production itself is very well judged, with occasional cloaks hanging on pegs to give the viewer a start, while the Rachel Portman score is beautiful and terrifying. And the ending? Unforgettable. But at its core are those handful of moments when the Woman appears. It's here that the filmmakers manage to capture a nightmare in a bottle.

To think that a nation watched this morose and scary television production on Christmas Eve makes me envy and pity them at the same time. It's been notoriously hard to find since its original broadcast, but Network now offer the definitive version on Blu Ray. The only real extra is a good one: a commentary featuring Mark Gatiss and Kim Newman. It was clearly recorded during the Covid-19 lockdown while all of us were trapped in our homes. But at least we had our ghosts for company.

British wrestling
always had a
dark side.
This magazine
explores it.
Send SAE for details.

British Wrestlers,
City House,
131 Friargate,
Preston, Lancs.
PR1 2EF.



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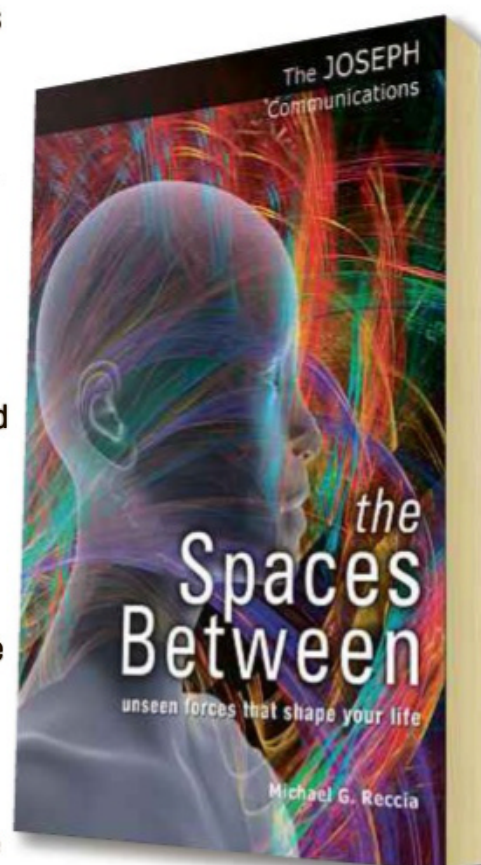
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LETTERS

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Detective James

Richard George ends his article “The ‘roll-off’ factor” [FT394:57] by offering an apparently unlikely role reversal: “Inspector Morse and MR James. Indeed, healthy scepticism may be more fortean than an uncritical acceptance of the supernatural. Morse as a psychic investigator? James as a Cambridge detective? Now that would be interesting...” James is a slightly odd choice here as I have always thought his attitude to the supernatural was quite fortean: while his stories certainly feature supernatural beings of one sort or another (rarely actual ghosts), in his own life he seems to have been pleasingly open-minded. Shane Leslie quotes him (possibly not entirely reliably) as saying: “Depend upon it! Some of these things are so, but we do not know the rules!”

However, I think James would have appreciated the idea of being a “Cambridge detective”. He read detective fiction avidly. In his letters he mentions a number of crime fiction writers; aside (obviously) from Conan Doyle, he enjoyed the works of such authors as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L Sayers and Edgar Wallace. He was also an enthusiast of true crime, including the State Trials series. In his autobiographical *Eton and King’s* he records a mourning card he found in a hotel in Yorkshire, containing a rhyme about the little-known Cropton Lane Farm Murders. One might even say that he wrote detective fiction himself, in that two of his stories, “The Stalls of Barchester Cathedral” and “Two Doctors”, essentially take the form of a collection of material from which the readers themselves are invited to act as detective and draw their own conclusions about the identity of a murderer.

Rosemary Pardoe
Chester

Humble hermit

Regarding Jan Bondeson’s excellent piece on the Hermit of Hainault Forest [FT394:77]: Jan says that “his home was a primitive hut he erected himself”. It was far more humble than that – a tent

SIMULACRA CORNER



This ostrich plank portrait was posted on Facebook by Jeanie Redford McDaniel, and sent to Fortean Towers by Duncan Kaiser.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 66598, London N11 9EN or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

fashioned from cloth over string tied to two trees!

One example of the Mandela Effect close to the heart of many interested in forteana but not mentioned in Brian Robb’s article [394:32-38] is the elusive Thunderbird photo. So many people remember seeing it but no one has yet managed to track it down.

Gary Tavender
By email

Outside the spectrum

I was surprised to read that ST Joshi and Richard Stanley would be debating the inspiration for HP Lovecraft’s concept of mysterious colours outside the human spectrum [FT390:28-35]. I always assumed the inspiration came from ‘The Damned Thing’ by Ambrose Bierce, one of Lovecraft’s favourites. The story’s

murderous entity is explained as coming from a colour spectrum unseen by the human eye. Bierce provides the information that “actinic rays” represent colours that humans cannot see, thanks to the human eye only perceiving a few octaves on the chromatic scale of colour. I’m sure Lovecraft enjoyed the last line: “And, God help me! The damned thing is of such a color!”

Brett Taylor
By email

Leek slashers

Re leek sabotage [‘Mulch, Myth and Magic’, FT392:53-54]: I live in the north-east of England and used to be a nurse in an elderly care home. The old men there had worked in the pits and the shipyards and leek competitions were a popular topic of reminiscence. They told me that leek sabotage was a very real threat to the

serious competitive grower. The reason why was that the prizes for the best leeks were humungous – perhaps a dining suite, a sofa, or a ticket to buy all the kids clothes at the Co-op store. People were not well off and these prizes would make a big difference to a family’s life and a man’s standing. There are still loads of leek shows around here, but the prizes are seldom more than a cup or a rosette – so you don’t hear so much about the leek slasher these days.

Liz Kirsopp
By email

Magic Onions

Lisa Gledhill’s letter [FT394:71] brought back a forgotten memory from my childhood. Whenever I caught a cold, my mother would cut an onion in half and place it on a saucer beside my bed, presumably to draw out the germs.

John Docherty
By email

Virtual rabbits

Is it just my weird mind, or isn’t it noteworthy that the book *The Imposteress Rabbit Breeder* [reviewed FT393: 61] is written by Karen Harvey?

Dawn Compton
By email

Korean Films

I enjoyed Bob Rickard’s romp through recent S Korean SF/Fantasy films [FT392:58-59]. However, an error crept into his overview [as pointed out in last issue’s errata, FT395:2]. Bong Joon-ho did not helm *Train to Busan*; that was Yeon Sang-ho. In fact, the film that introduced Director Bong to an international audience was *The Host*, which Bob mentions later in his article. Any readers who haven’t caught up with his English language films, *Okja* and *Snowpiercer*, should see them. Available on streaming services, they take in a number of fortean concepts, and tread a similar thematic tightrope to *Parasite* as they amalgamate genuine social issues with bonkers plot twists. Highly entertaining.

Jim A Thomas
Sheffield, South Yorkshire

Sweating and dreaming

I think the “alternative suggestion” mentioned in ‘The Sweating Sickness’ [FT394:13] doesn’t hold water. It appears that there were distinct outbreaks over more than 50 years, and then it died out, which I would suggest was due to the quick lethality of the disease – it ran out of victims too quickly to spread. Although medicine was undoubtedly primitive compared to today, and there were some quite bizarre practices, I don’t believe the doctors were systematically and inadvertently killing their patients. They would have had experience of fevers and other symptoms, and even if they were misguided, I think it is unlikely they would have caused their patients’ deaths in two or three hours. It also equally affected the poor, who quite possibly had no access to doctors, especially in that short timeframe.

- Regarding “Going Grey Overnight” (Medical Bag FT394:23), the stories about such happenings refer to the whole head of hair going grey or white through shock. It appears that scientists have simply confirmed that stress can in effect turn off the mechanism which creates hair colour, so that as the hair lengthens you see grey roots. That is not the same thing. As for Marie Antoinette’s hair going white overnight, I think it is quite possible that she used various hair products, and that when she was arrested she no longer had access to these, and her hair reverted to its more natural (ash blond) colour. However I believe the fashion in those days was to powder the hair so it appeared white anyway, so maybe this story is just a myth.

- Regarding the possibility that reality is being edited, I saw in one of the articles on memory in FT394 a comment on the fact that we often forget our dreams, but on going back to look for it afterwards, I can’t find it. Creepy! Anyway, I’ll press on with my comments regardless. I think the reason we tend to

forget our dreams is possibly two-fold. Firstly, there is no context; it simply swims into your (un)consciousness for no apparent reason, so it is difficult to file it away. Secondly, there is no sensual input; the images and sounds haven’t come in through eyes and ears, and there are no associated smells, or background sights and sounds, so there are no triggers to assist with recall.

Dave Miles

By email

Mandela Effect

I really enjoyed Brian Robb’s excellent article about the Mandela Effect with its exploration of potential causes [FT394:32-38]. As noted in Peter Laws’ report, I spoke about this phenomenon at the LAPIS 2019 conference [FT390:15], along with other memory-linked forteen topics. However, my conclusions were quite different from those of Robb. As he reported, it all started when Fiona Broome launched ‘The Mandela Effect’ website (<https://mandelaeffect-site.wordpress.com/>) to discuss memories that don’t seem to

match documented history. Fiona herself had memories of Nelson Mandela dying in prison and while in the ‘green room’ at a Dragon Con she found that other people remembered the same from the late 20th century; quoting *nearly identical* details of the coverage on American, Canadian, and British TV. No one could explain that coincidence.

One of her book editors then encouraged her to start a website about the Mandela Effect, to measure public interest in it. Within a couple of years the topic grew, with visitors to the website learning about others’ memories where there were similar incorrect details and points of reference, and which involved multiple, unconnected people. Fiona stresses that this isn’t about conspiracy, and it isn’t about ‘false memories’, and makes some speculations that Robb covered in his article.

Naturally, I quoted examples from the website in my LAPIS presentation. These included the Tiananmen Square ‘Tank Boy’, the number of states in the USA being 51 or 52 (rather than 50), whether Forrest Gump said ‘Life

was like a box of chocolates...’ or ‘Life is like a box of chocolates...’ and people being certain that actors David Soul and Ernest Borgnine were dead and then being surprised when they appeared ‘live’ on television. But how many times have you watched a ‘live’ television programme when someone came on and you said ‘I thought he/she was dead!’ – I know I have more than once. It generally happens when the famous person concerned has been out of the limelight for a good period of time.

Indeed, when you examine most of the examples quoted (other than perhaps Mandela’s death in prison and the *Shazaam* movie) they are comparatively trivial and misremembering a spelling is not a ‘phenomenon’! Many people have difficulties with spelling and so it is no surprise when different versions turn up – ‘Looney Tunes’ or ‘Looney Toons’? Equally, making misquotes is common – just listen to MSM journalists every day – so who can be certain of what Darth Vader or the evil Queen in *Snow White* actually said, particularly if you only saw the film once (many years ago) and you have been exposed to other people making incorrect quotes?

As an illustration of how memories can play tricks, and before I researched the Mandela Effect for the conference, I asked Janet and Paul at LAPIS to get ‘*Memories are made of this*’ by Perry Como to play as part of my Introduction. This was because it always reminds me of my Auntie Joan who was a big Perry Como fan, and I was going to describe how things such as music can instantly bring back memories of people and places. But Paul came back to me and said he couldn’t find the track – only a version by Dean Martin. So when I checked I realised that it *was* by Dean Martin – Perry Como never recorded the song! I then realised that I had been thinking about Perry Como’s ‘*Magic Moments*’ which has the line “memories we’ve been sharing”. This was *not* the Mandela Effect – it was a demonstration of how memory can sometimes work.



Star jelly

On the 17 November 2018, my walking buddy and I were hiking across Hameldon Hill near Burnley, Lancashire. It was a bright, sunny day, with few clouds in the sky. On a number of occasions we came across some of the infamous “star jelly”. I placed a £1 coin next to a particularly large lump, and took this photograph.

John Starr, *By email*

Editor’s note: According to folklore, star jelly, astromyxins, or pwdre ser (rot of the stars) in Welsh, is deposited on Earth during meteor showers – but there are other suggestions.



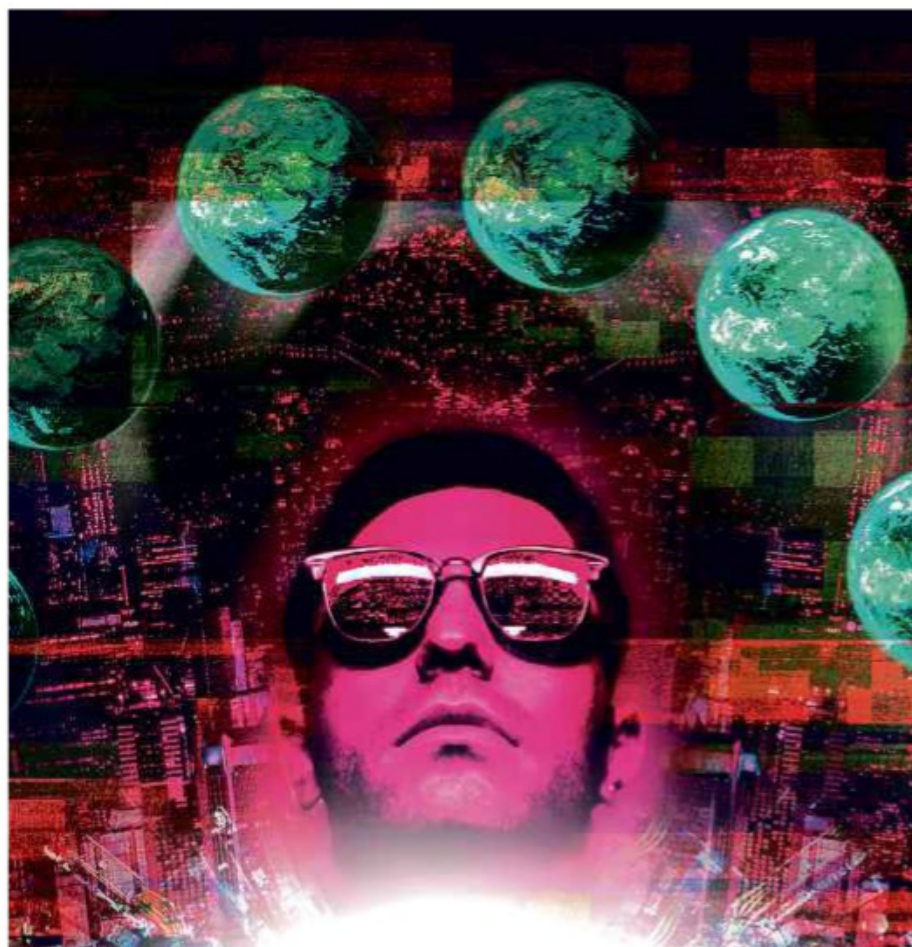
I can see how a few ‘good cases’ – such as Nelson Mandela’s alleged death in prison – begged the question of whether there is an actual phenomenon. But by the naming of the phenomenon and setting up a website to collect more examples, it strikes me that virtually all quoted cases are not phenomenological at all – they are just people having varying memories for a myriad of reasons. No two people will remember everything exactly the same. Everyone will have been exposed to events via different media at different times in different places and made their own interpretations; which thereby construct their ‘memories’ of those events. It is just a fact of life.

Perhaps Fiona’s book editor was being particularly shrewd when (s)he encouraged her to start the website; it will certainly have helped her maintain an ongoing celebrity on the paranormal phenomena circuit.

Rob Gandy
By email

I have a few observations to make about Brian Robb’s “Mind Warp!” article concerning the Mandela Effect. Examples such as those involving the Berenstain/Berenstein Bears, KitKat vs Kit-Kat, the appearance of the Ford logo, whether or not Monopoly’s Uncle Pennybags wore a monocle, etc, can, I suggest, be dismissed because often people are very unobservant and are simply not reliable witnesses.

Indulge me in this example: I don’t look back on my school days fondly, as I always felt like an outcast although I never knew why. I was picked on and bullied. I was called “stupid” which angered me because it was obvious to me that I was anything but. It’s taken me over 50 years to recognise from certain traits in my own behaviour, obsessions, phobias, rituals, etc, that I am somewhere on the Asperger Syndrome spectrum. “Normal” people will often gloss over details and do not appear to see things that are in plain sight, whereas people like me, with more obsessive personalities, notice all sorts of fine detail.



At school, aged 12, I was sitting in our form room at registration one morning, with everyone chatting. A girl sitting in the row in front of me had turned around and was telling an anecdote to me and the boy sitting next to me. This required her to make a quick sketch of the cello she was learning to play in music lessons; we would often see her lugging around the instrument in its heavy case. I remember her making a crude drawing, giving a running commentary as she did so: “Here’s the body, this is the neck, and the strings, and then there’s a soundhole here...” She drew a round hole beneath the strings on the body of the instrument, just like you would see on an acoustic guitar. “But,” I protested, “a cello doesn’t have a hole there...” “Don’t be so stupid,” she retorted, with the boy next to me echoing her sentiments. “Of course it has a hole, how do you think the sound comes out?”

I tried explaining that a cello as a member of the violin family traditionally has a pair of f-holes, each positioned either side of the bridge. I couldn’t believe that someone who actually played the instrument could be so unobservant. Had she actually ever properly looked at her cello? I wonder if she and the other

boy ever eventually noticed the existence of f-holes on orchestral string instruments and thought to themselves, “Wait a minute, didn’t they used to have round holes under the strings like a guitar? When did that change?”

I’m also reminded of that old chestnut concerning several characters in the Captain Pugwash cartoons having risqué names (Master Bates, Seaman Staines, Roger the Cabin Boy, etc) and indeed recall a heated argument only a couple of years ago I had with friends who insisted that this was the reality of the situation. “How come I remember it? I used to watch it as a kid...” protested one of my mates. Captain Pugwash’s shipmates were actually Master Mate and Tom the Cabin Boy. It doesn’t take a genius to uncover the correct information, but many will prefer the urban legend because it is more amusing.

On the other side of the coin, one of my own “Mandela Effect” experiences concerns a small car. The retro-looking Nissan Figaro was first introduced at the 1989 Tokyo Motor Show and went into production in 1991. It looks as if it could have been designed in

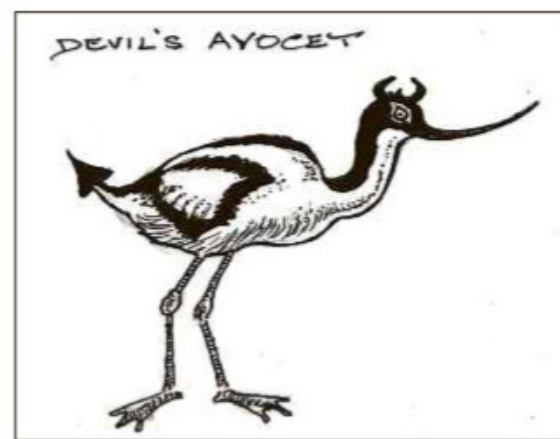
the 1950s or 1960s. I was unaware of it until an example was shown in the pilot episode of *Doctor Who* spin-off, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, broadcast 1 January 2007. Suddenly I seemed to be seeing these cars everywhere. I asked myself how I could not have noticed such a distinctive looking vehicle previously. It was just the sort of thing that would have sparked my curiosity and was not the usual generic streamlined box on wheels. I joked at the time that someone must have travelled back in time and changed history.

Going off on a tangent now on this general subject, I have a theory regarding our existence within the multiverse, although I accept it may not be a unique concept and could be an already known and published theory. (I’m sure someone will be quick to tell me if it is – otherwise, please name it after me).

Many of us have experienced close shaves, near misses and potentially fatal accidents, one small mistake being literally a matter of life or death. I think of the time when as a small child I nearly suffocated during an attack of croup but for the quick thinking of my father, who managed to calm me and stabilise my breathing until medical help arrived. What if he had reacted differently and panicked?

The theory supposes that each of us may have already died, possibly several times over, but from our own individual perception we go on living, having experienced a narrow escape or two because whenever possible our consciousness passes into the splinter universe version of ourselves each time a decision has been made governing our own life or death.

continued on page 72



NICK MALORET

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Nose pad windfall

Just having read the excellent book *JOTT* by Mary Rose Barrington [see **FT392:20-22**], I thought I would relate an experience that my husband and I had. Six years ago, we lost a very dear friend – who died most suddenly and unexpectedly on a holiday abroad. It was a huge shock for his family and friends. Because of the length of time it took to hold the funeral, there was a long period of waiting. During this time, one day we were surprised to discover a piece of plastic in the middle of our hallway. We found it was the nose pad to a pair of glasses, inscribed with the word “Police”. We knew this was a make of sunglasses – but neither of us owned a pair from that brand. This was during a very wet and miserable March – so it was extremely unlikely that any of our visitors were wearing sunglasses when they came into the house (not that we remembered anyone wearing any.) Our hallway has laminate flooring and is swept regularly. It is a thoroughfare for us to get to the kitchen and upstairs. It seemed unlikely that this was walked into the house – for example stuck to the sole of a shoe – as it was perfectly clean and had no scratches. A few days later, we were chatting to our friend’s wife and mentioned our find in passing. She remarked that that was the brand of sunglasses her late husband was wearing on holiday. We

all thought this was a “bit of a coincidence”. I don’t know if his glasses were missing that particular piece, however.

Under Barrington’s classification I believe this would come under “windfall” (an article of unknown origin appearing in a place where it could not have been before). She also observes that many JOTTs have connections with those who have recently died. Was our friend trying to send us a message? Even if it was “Just One of Those Things”, it did make us think that our friend was “still with us” in some way.

Sue Hardiman
Kingswood, Bristol

Phantom Smells

Many times in hauntings, the phantom odour of a particular perfume or cigar smoke is said to be associated with ghostly activity; and in miraculous Marian apparitions and visitations, the fragrance of roses is often reported. Moreover, the Beef-eaters of the Tower of London, at times, smell phantom roast beef in the Tower.

For over 20 years, I’ve been experiencing a series of peculiar phantom smells. It started when I was living in Las Vegas in the late 1990s. Ever since I was young, I’ve been severely allergic to pollen. For two weeks in early spring 1997, I left Vegas to do a visiting artist gig in subarctic northern Sweden, where the landscape was still covered in deep snow. When I

returned to Vegas, I found out that when I was away, it was an uncommonly wet spring in usually dry Nevada. A large amount of rainfall had caused the trees and shrubs to flourish and burst forth in bloom, producing an alarming quantity of pollen. It was literally raining a bright green material. When I drove in my car, I had to use my windshield wipers to clear away the green dust. At that time, I experienced the worst allergic reaction in my life that lasted for weeks, culminating in an unbearable sinus infection. I believe that travelling from a pristine pollen-free frozen landscape to a pollen-laden environment had caused an abnormally harsh allergic reaction. One day I woke up and everything smelled like burnt toast! That is every damn thing including flowers, soap, dog poop, all food and even my own body. I was left with only one scent. At times, medical patients experience a similar reaction after a severe stroke or migraine. After chemotherapy, my brother experienced an abhorrent rotting stench.

Bizarrely, over time, for me, the burnt toast smell morphed into the aroma of other oven-baked products. First everything smelled like pepperoni pizza – and then fresh cinnamon buns. I remember walking into an artist’s studio that apparently reeked of oil paints and harsh solvents. To me it smelled like scrumptious cinnamon buns fresh from the oven. I deduced that I could not actually smell anything, but my olfactory system was so starved for smells that it retrieved a smell from my memory to compensate for the complete absence of odours.

Another strange thing would happen when I was watching TV or a movie; if the scene showed someone smoking, I could distinctly smell the cigarette smoke. On the other hand at night when I’d wake up from a dream, I’d sometimes smell the thick toxic smoke of a house fire. I would get up and

frantically run around looking for the fire. The smell of heavy smoke lingered in my nostrils for around 10 minutes. A year or so later, the hallucinatory dream smell morphed into the pungent aroma of marijuana smoke – like a whole room of potheads having a party in my bedroom, but alas no such luck. The tang would linger long after I was awake. At first, I smelled the smoky stench in more of a sleep-related hypnagogic state; however the odour would continue long after I was wide-awake. The smells were all related to heat: first burnt toast, then bakery goods, house fire, cigarette smoke, and to top it off pungent whiffs of reefer.

After the bakery goods and various smoke-related phantom smells, the experience morphed again into something I can hardly explain. For a while I would smell odours that do not exist on Earth – I would smell something equivalent to strong cleaning fluid, a kind that has never been actually manufactured. It was a smell that was totally made-up by my brain! For some reason, these unearthly smells would manifest mainly on airline flights.

Right in the middle of these experiences, I had a different kind of olfactory phenomenon: for a moment I had enhanced super-smell or *hyperosmia*. When I was getting gas at a Chevron gas station, I could suddenly smell absolutely everything for a few fleeting minutes – not only the gasoline, but also the rubber of the tires, my own bodily odours, the cement slab foundation, someone cutting grass blocks away and an unseen donut shop baking goodies way down the street. It was wild. Everything had a separate and distinct odour, even things that I never realised gave off subtle odours – it was like an olfactory orgasm! I felt like a dog – or more specifically as if I had the scent receptors of a bloodhound (or *le chien de Saint-Hubert*). The *hyperosmia*



event only lasted for a flash and has never occurred again. Later I talked to a medical researcher about the experience and he suggested that possibly the gasoline could have acted as a catalyst to stimulate and magnify my sense of smell.

Phantom smells are olfactory hallucinations or *phantosmia*; this is often confused with *parosmia*, a distorted sense of smell. For instance in *parosmia*, the fragrance of flowers could trigger a nasty chemical odour instead. Now in my daily reality I can barely smell a thing, but some rare stray odours do find their way to my nose – ones that are usually pungent artificial odours that I don't want to smell, like scented cat litter or clothes dryer fragrances.

Jeffrey Vallance
Canoga Park, California

Restless nights

As a consultant geologist I have travelled the world on various engineering projects. In the early 2000s, while I was still under 30, I had a couple of unnerving experiences in two separate parts of the world.

In December 2003, my girlfriend from Jakarta and I headed out of the city, down to the south coast of Java for a couple of days' break at a small beach resort. It was a four-hour drive through busy towns and villages, taking in some impressive scenery from the volcanic peaks that dominate the region of west Java. In the early evening, we reached the coastal town of Pelabuhan Ratu and from there it was another 20-minute drive to the Ocean Queen Resort, where we were to stay. Perhaps we visited out of season, but there was a very subdued air about the place. Barely anyone was around and I felt that our presence was greeted with some vague kind of bemusement. However, the resort itself was very nice, with large and comfortable bamboo huts right on the beach and a big swimming pool. We only spent a couple of nights there.

I had been told that this part of Java was heavily steeped in legend, specifically regarding a local deity known as Nyai Roro Kidul, the Queen of the Southern Sea – a beautiful woman who lived in an underwater



A local deity was known as Queen of the Southern Sea

kingdom and whose moods were reflected in the conditions of the sea. She would occasionally lure the odd fisherman to his death, and people were encouraged not to wear green, as it was her colour and would make her angry. People still gave offerings to keep her happy and there was even a room reserved for her in one of the nearby hotels. Locals spoke of a fire that gutted the hotel a few years before, leaving only her reserved room intact.

The night before our departure was one of my most uncomfortable and disturbing in many years. I was awoken several times by an unbearable heat; the overhead fans offered no relief. As I lay awake, I thought there must have been a raging tempest outside as I could clearly hear the crashing of waves on the beach. However,

when I took a stroll to try and cool down, the seas were calm and there was not a breath of wind. Puzzled, I went back to bed and tried unsuccessfully to get some sleep. A short time later, I was convinced that there was someone or something creeping around our hut. It may have been an animal, but I guess I let my imagination carry me away for it felt more like a presence than something tangible, like something very bad and out to do harm. The feeling of dread was overpowering and I was torn between confronting my own fear to find out what (if anything) was out there – or keeping safe in the hut. I couldn't wait for the morning. When it finally came and it was time to check out, I was glad to leave for the relative safety of Jakarta.

Many years later, I was inspired to draw a picture of Nyai Roro Kidul, rising out of the waters of the South Java Sea (reproduced above).

● In July 2005, I had a two-week training course in the United States. On my second week I flew to Louisiana for a

few days of field training. I was met at New Orleans airport by one of my mentors and it was about a two-hour drive to the rig-site at Thibodaux, a small town in rural Louisiana. It was typically "new world" with wide roads, malls and large suburban houses. However, the original settlement looked remarkably European and the buildings 200 years old or more (probably a throwback to the original French colonists). Here and there, I could see the original plantations with large white painted mansions with their distinctive verandas. I was put up in a nearby motel about five minutes from the rig-site. It was a standard type of accommodation seen right across the States – and, most importantly, it was air conditioned, essential in that part of the world, especially in July.

On one particular evening, after being dropped off at my room, I felt particularly tired after a long day in the field and fell asleep almost as soon as I hit the bed. I recall it was quite early when I got in, no more than 7:30pm. After a deep sleep, I awoke and turned to check the time on my bedside clock, which had just turned to midnight. Something caught my eye by the window next to the entrance to my room. I thought it was a shadow of someone passing by outside, but a moment later it appeared to be in the room. It had the form of a young woman dressed in old-fashioned clothes – perhaps early 19th century – a long grey dress down to the heels. She had long dark hair and was tying it back as she silently glided from left to right. She glanced at me as she moved and then abruptly vanished before she reached the wall.

I bolted up and sat upright on the bed. The apparition scared the living daylight out of me although I did not feel that I was under any threat. It was almost as if time had momentarily flickered, rather like a TV signal does occasionally, and presented me with a projection of a person from another age going about their business. Needless to say, I couldn't get a wink of sleep for the rest of the night.

Stuart Carroll
By email

LETTERS

continued from page 69

In one reality we die; in the other we live. Our consciousness, quite naturally, would take the path whereby we survive and so that is our perception.

We may have already died in all manner of life or death situations, but our consciousness, call it a “soul” if you will, crosses over to the splinter universe where a different decision was made and in which we survive. Back in the parent universe we will have died and that would be the perception of the others who we leave behind in that universe. Unless they died alongside us as part of the same decision, causing the splintering of realities, our parent universe contemporaries will remain in the version of reality in which we passed away, while their identical counterparts will share our new reality. If this is happening for each and every person, the sheer number of realities constantly being created is mind-boggling.

Of course, we all have to die eventually; we can’t just keep conveniently hopping over to alternative realities in splinter universes each and every time the chips are down. A final inescapable death would happen in a situation where the only possible outcome is death, with no other options. What we’d experience after that... I wouldn’t like to venture an opinion at the moment.

A dangerous theory maybe? It’s definitely not one to live your life by, and I do not advocate reckless living because of any promise of entering a splinter universe when it all goes tits up.

Gavin Lloyd Wilson
Glandwr, Pembrokeshire

Brian Robb’s article mainly served to illustrate the outlandish lengths 21st century humans are prepared to go to rather than admit they were a bit wrong about something. Misspelled a name? Failed a history test? Obviously there must be a glitch in the matrix. Does anyone else remember a dish called humble pie back in the 1980s?



Romany tombs

Alan Murdie interesting piece on gypsy ghosts [FT393:18-21] reminded me of the “king’s tombs” in Bonn. It is a little known fact that one of the major burial places of Romany and Sinti kings and presidents lies in Bonn, east of the Rhine in Beuel. The heads of the families are called kings when they are Catholics, and presidents when they are Protestants. Both Protestant and Catholic Sinti and Romany people worship the Virgin Mary, and their graves are very similar. Their tombs consist of a large temple in black marble, often with the life-sized image of the deceased, and a table and chairs for the relatives to meet. The tradition started in 1964, and it is assumed to be based on the fact that nearby Pützchens Markt, or Well Fair, is a place most travellers regularly come to, so that they can also visit the tombs. In addition, the city of Bonn’s website claims that “many believe that the deceased have to be buried at least 50km (30 miles) from their home – otherwise, they will not find peace and must return as ghosts.”

While the place is not really spooky, it is a sight worth seeing.
Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany

No? Must be just me. Either that or it was all gobbled up by that pesky Hadron Collider.

Mark Graham
Huddersfield, West Yorkshire

One of the case studies in the article on the Mandela Effect may just be an artefact of middle-aged misremembering. While there was no movie entitled *Shazaam* about an incompetent genie, there was a late 1960s cartoon shown in the UK called *Shazzan*, contemporaneous with the Arabian Knights cartoon that featured in *The Banana Splits*. Details can be found on imdb, but the genie in this production was accomplished and summoned by two kids pressing together two pieces of a finger ring they found in the desert. It’s

likely that vague recollections of this spawned a mutated memory infection of the type postulated by Dr Henry Roediger in Mr Robb’s feature.

Jim Whyteside
Broom, East Renfrewshire

Re possible glitches in consensus reality: I recently bought a box of Scott’s Porridge Oats. When I looked at the box, it was spelt porage, not porridge. Apparently, it’s always been spelt that way, but I’m sure a lot of people misremember this.

Ken Wilson
Preston, Lancashire

Regarding the ‘Mandela Effect’, alluding to the apparent disconnect between memories and reality, I do believe that reality

can be changed around us, and that we may indeed be living in a computer simulation, as suggested by Dr Nick Bostrom and Neil deGrasse Tyson. See my book *Our Holographic World: The shocking truth about time and reality* (Empiricus Books, 2014). I listed the strange phenomenon of ordinary people suddenly being plunged momentarily into historical settings. I drew attention to time warp cases, like the one about the American family who saw a news announcement of JFK’s assassination before it actually occurred.

I cited several of my own experiences of recalling events or scenes I had read about in books that were not there when the book was re-read. Often the physical reality of the book disappears, and can’t be found listed in any bibliographic archive. In a short biography by Martin Gilbert I read that Winston Churchill once conversed with the ghost of his father while painting at his easel. Later I could find no trace of this book in any archive. Apparently this spooky event was made up by Churchill himself, and was described in a book published in 2006 by one Paul K Alkon, which I had not read or heard about.

The vanishing episodes of real things indicate there must be a glitch in reality. I used the hologram analogy after reading speculative theories about aliens being able to conjure up unreal worlds that become real, and may have actually created Earth itself. Physicists at the University of Washington in 2012 said that computers may ultimately be able to build reality simulators after being pump-primed with cosmic physics. They can then develop ‘signatures’ – a kind of template – which shows that whatever they can draw up can become real (Huffpost Tech: www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/11/1/). But there is often a glitch – a tiny fault – that can occur in any computer, or IT system, as we know too well. That might be what is going on. [See FT394:72].

Antony Milne
London

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Fortean Traveller



122. Magical Heights: San Marino, San Leo and Count Cagliostro

In early April 2019, **ROB GANDY** travelled with his wife Margaret to the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy and San Marino, ahead of a trip to Rome. He was not looking to find anything fortean – but something fortean found him...



ABOVE: A view of the forbidding Fortress of San Leo, where Cagliostro was imprisoned until his death in 1795.

San Marino is the capital of the Republic of San Marino, a small independent country surrounded by Italian territory. Football fans will be aware of it because its team is often considered to be the worst national side in the history of the sport; up to 2014 it had only ever won one match of 155 played, conceding 667 goals (and scoring just 23) in the process.¹ In fairness, it should also be mentioned that San Marino scored the second fastest goal in FIFA World Cup qualification history, against England (!) on 17 November 1993 (8.3 seconds) before going on to lose 7-1. While the lower reaches of the Republic are typically urban, the city itself sits atop rugged Mount Titano, with its mediæval old town and cobbled streets. There are three towers along its eastern ridge, which formed part of the city's

His séances were the rage of fashionable Paris society

ancient defensive system and are celebrated on the country's flag and coat of arms. The first, Guaita, was constructed in the 11th century and was famous for being impenetrable, which greatly discouraged attacks on the city. At 2,477ft (755m) above sea level, there are fantastic views in all directions: the Adriatic to the east at Rimini and the Apennines to the west. Legend has it that the city was founded by the Dalmatian stone-cutter Saint Marinus and several Christian refugees in the year 301 and became a centre for Christian refugees

fleeing Roman persecution.

The city is clearly something of a tourist centre, as witnessed by the number of school and coach parties clambering up and down its steep streets and along the path connecting the towers. It is certainly a 'must visit' location if you are in this neck of the woods, and though it's not a particularly fortean destination, there are several fortean-themed attractions, with a heavy reliance on waxworks: two torture-related museums (I didn't expect the San Marino Inquisition), a *Museum of Curiosities*, and the *Museum of Vampires and Werewolves*!² Exactly why the city should find itself host to such curiosa I cannot say.

We had a spare day before setting off for Rome, so my friends and colleagues, Alberto and Pietro, suggested they take us to San Leo, a little over 13 miles (21.5 km) from San

Marino, through wonderful countryside. It is considered one of Italy's most beautiful villages, and was capital of the Italian kingdom between 961 and 963. According to legend, San Leo was founded by Leo, another stone-cutter from Dalmatia and friend of the aforementioned Marinus (before they both became saints), in order to spread the word of God. The village's cobbled square is flanked by a ninth-century parish church and a Romanesque cathedral, home to centuries' worth of art.

Dominating the village is the large and spectacular fortress that sits atop the ancient Mons Feretrius at an elevation of 2,000ft (600m) above sea level. San Leo was always valued for its strategic situation, overlooking and helping to control the Val Marecchia. The current fortress was primarily built by the famous Sienese architect and engineer Francesco di Giorgio Martini in the late 1470s, and, with its squat round towers giving a sense of impenetrability, is one of the best examples of his ideas put into practice. He was the author of "a treatise on civil and military architecture" which inaugurated a new era in fortification, and was much admired by Leonardo Da Vinci. The fortress employs the natural cliff face, bulwarks, corbels and machicolations (floor openings between the supporting corbels of a battlement, through which stones could be dropped on attackers at the base of a defensive wall), along with innovative elbow-shaped walls (as opposed to the largely circular design previously used). Control of San Leo moved from the Byzantines to the Lombards and on to the Papacy, largely due to events elsewhere rather than the fortress itself falling into enemy hands. Indeed, one of the only times it was taken by force involved an intrepid raid in 1441, when enemy soldiers scaled the mountain during the night and took the Malatestas by surprise. Machiavelli called this crag-top fortress Italy's finest military redoubt, while Dante drew inspiration from the castle

for parts of Purgatory in *The Divine Comedy*.

It was upon arrival at the entrance of the fortress that things got distinctly fortean: there before us was a sign referring to Alessandro Count Cagliostro. Cagliostro was renowned as an alchemist, occultist, and magician who claimed to be capable of psychic healing and scrying, although many viewed him as a charlatan and adventurer. His life is shrouded in rumour, propaganda and mysticism; it was only after his arrest for possible participation in the 'Affair of the Diamond Necklace', a plot that defamed Queen Marie Antoinette and paved the way for the French revolution,³ that it was established he was born Giuseppe Balsamo in Palermo, Sicily, in 1743. He was the son of poor parents, but his grandfather and uncles ensured that he received a solid education. After a series of minor crimes, he escaped from Sicily and travelled through a range of countries around the Mediterranean and Middle East, making a living by various (and often nefarious) means. He married Lorenza Seraphina Feliciani in 1768 and assumed the title of count, before travelling to London and then on to the major European cities, selling elixirs of youth and love powders. His reputation as an alchemist and healer gained him access to the most important courts, where he befriended prominent personalities such as Schiller and Goethe. His séances were the rage of fashionable society in Paris by 1785, when he became embroiled in the 'Affair'. This resulted in nine months in the Bastille prison, banishment from France and a return to England.

But it was involvement in Masonic circles that was key to his ultimate demise. In 1776 'Joseph Cagliostro' was admitted as a Freemason of the Esperance Lodge No 289 in Gerrard Street, Soho, London. He then took the Rite of Misraïm, which was filled with alchemical, occult and Egyptian references. Between 1767 and 1775 he received the *Arcana Arcanorum*, which are three very high hermetic degrees, from the brother of the national Grand Master of Neapolitan Masonry and in 1788 introduced them into the Rite of Misraïm.⁴ By founding a Lodge dedicated to Egyptian Rites and assuming the title of 'Gran Cofto

d'Egitto' he was seen as openly challenging the Church.

On a visit to Rome in 1789 he met two people who were spies of the Inquisition (some accounts suggest his wife betrayed him, denouncing him as a heretic, magician and Freemason). He was arrested and imprisoned in the Castel Sant'Angelo, before being tried for heresy and sedition and sentenced to death in 1790. His Masonic manuscripts, regalia and instruments were publicly destroyed in Rome's Piazza della Minerva. However, Cagliostro publicly renounced the principles of his professed doctrine, and was pardoned by Pope Pius VI, who commuted the sentence to life imprisonment in the fortress at San Leo, from which it was considered to be impossible to escape.

I had been completely unaware of the connection between Cagliostro and San Leo, but taking it as an example of fortean serendipity, explored the history and specific locations involved. Initially, Cagliostro was housed in the Treasury vault, the bleakest part of the entire fortress, varying between extremes of cold and damp and hot and humid. It took its name from the tradition that it was where the Dukes of Urbino

kept their treasure during the numerous and repeated assaults on the castle. The soldiers on duty day and night were ordered not to talk to the prisoner, who had also been banned from using paper, pen and ink. Access to the fortress was constantly monitored and all foreigners banned. But there were rumours that some of Cagliostro's supporters were plotting his escape, and therefore Count Semproni, the man in charge, decided to transfer him to the 'Pozzetto' cell, located in the central part of the keep, which he considered even safer and stronger than the Treasury. ('Pozzetto' means a 'manhole' or 'shaft' to a sewer, which gives some idea of the conditions). Cagliostro's imprisonment lasted more than four years, and documents concerning his treatment, based on humanitarian principles, are preserved in the Pesaro State Archive.

The 'Pozzetto' was of narrow dimensions, being only three metres square. The only exterior opening was a small window, fitted with three rows of gratings, which overlooked the parish church and cathedral – Cagliostro's only view of the outside world. There was also a small slit window

that looked onto the staircase, which guards could use to check on him. Otherwise, the only way into (or out of) the cell was through a trap door in the ceiling, which connected with the guardhouse, immediately above. The prisoner was lowered into the cell through this hatch, as was his food. Supervision by the guards was continuous. Indeed, they could keep Cagliostro under watch without themselves being seen, which was important to them as they feared his gaze, by which they might be hypnotised and induced into freeing him. Occasionally, they would descend into the cell to carry out periodical inspections of the room and prisoner.

Although many other prisoners were housed in the 'Pozzetto' over the years, it is not surprising that it is commonly referred to as 'Cagliostro's Cell'. And it was on 26 August 1795, now seriously ill, that he died due to a stroke. The death certificate is preserved in the parish archive of San Leo and was written in Latin by the Archpriest Luigi Marini:

Giuseppe Balsamo, nicknamed Count of Cagliostro, of Palermo, baptised but incredulous, heretic, famous for his bad name, after having spread the emphatic doctrine of Egyptian Freemasonry to various European countries, to which he gained an infinite number of followers with subtle deceptions, he ran into various vicissitudes, which he did not escape without damage, by virtue of his cunning and skill; finally by sentence of the Holy Inquisition relegated to perpetual prison in the fortress of this city, with the hope that he repented, having endured with the same firmness and obstinacy the hardships of the prison for four years, four months, five days, caught by a sudden stroke, of a perfidious mind and a wicked heart such as he was, not having given the least sign of repentance, he died without mourning, outside the Communion of Saint M. Church, at the age of fifty-two, two months and eighteen days. Born unhappy, the more unhappy he lived, very unhappy he died on 26 August of the aforementioned year at approximately 22.45. On this occasion a public prayer was called, if ever the merciful God turned his gaze to the work of his hands. As a heretic, excommunicated, an impenitent sinner, he is denied burial according to the ecclesiastical rite.



BELOW: Cagliostro holds one of his magical séances for the fashionable citizens of pre-revolutionary Paris.



ABOVE LEFT: The wooden bed in the “Pozzetto”, the small cell in which Cagliostro spent his final years. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The small internal window looking down into the cell; guards could observe their prisoner while avoiding his ‘hypnotic’ gaze. **BELOW:** Rob (left), wife Margaret and friends Alberto and Pietro with San Leo Fortress behind.

The corpse is buried right on the extreme point of the mountain that looks to the west, almost at the same distance between the two forts... commonly called the Palazzetto and the Casino, on the ground of the Reverend Camera Apostolica on the 28th at 18.15.

It is not possible to access the Treasury vault, which is down some steep steps, but you can look inside through the gate and see that it would not be a pleasant place in which to be incarcerated. (It appeared that people had tossed money in through the gate on to the floor for some reason). When I walked around the ‘Pozzetto’ cell there was only a simple wooden bed, with a few flowers on it. The light from the window was good, but it was easy to imagine how dark, cold and claustrophobic it would be at night, particularly in winter. You might be wondering how I managed to get into the cell: was I lowered down by a rope, or is there now a ladder from the guardhouse? Neither: there is a doorway to the cell, but this was created in the 19th century, long after Cagliostro’s death.

Interestingly, the fortress appears to be important to the Italian Masonic lodges, presumably because of the Cagliostro connection. In one part of the museum there were exhibits of Masonic aprons and other items, and there were many photos of high-ranking Masonic personnel.

Admission to the fortress and museum is only six euros, and represents excellent value.



It was easy to imagine how claustrophobic it would be

There are stunning views in all directions, and if you look over the side in some places there is a sheer drop. While people like me will make a beeline for the Cagliostro-related areas, there is much else to see, including exhibits on the history of the fortress, guns and weapons, and a ‘celle di punizione’ or torture dungeon, which includes some pretty horrible ways to inflict pain – racks, wheels, gibbets, and lots of sharp things. To complement the dungeon there is an upstairs exhibition of other forms of punishment,

including a large barrel placed over people who had been found guilty of drunkenness and from which only the head and feet protruded; this acted as a form of stocks, as the occupant was pelted with vegetables as he ran around trying to avoid them. There might be an element of the macabre in several of the exhibits, but San Leo knows how to have a good time, holding seasons of events and various festivals, which bring in locals and tourists alike.

But they never forget old Cagliostro, and hold the *AlchimiAlchimie* each year in late August where they celebrate him with an array of performance and other events which culminate in a magnificent fireworks display from the fortress.⁵

VISITING THE REGION

We really enjoyed our trip to the fortress, and I was pleased

to have found so much of fortean interest. If you fancy visiting San Leo and San Marino then the nearest main airport is Bologna, whence you can get buses or hire a car (if you like driving around hairpin bends). If you are feeling particularly energetic and have the right kind of bike, then why not take the *Visita a Cagliostro* bicycle route?⁶ Or perhaps just a part of it, as the whole itinerary is a 65 mile (105km) round trip. It sets out from Rimini towards San Salvatore and Ospedaletto, climbing up to Faetano, Montegiardino and Fiorentino (at 1,900ft/580m) before sweeping down to Castello di Montemaggio (800ft/244m) and climbing back up to San Leo. This is not for the faint-hearted.

NOTES

1 www.complex.com/sports/2014/10/9-reasons-why-san-marino-worst-football-team-all-time/

1 www.thetorturemuseum.it/; www.museodellecerersm.com/; www.museodellecuriosita.sm/; www.museodeivampiri.com/

3 <http://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/history/key-dates/affair-diamond-necklace-1784-1785>

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rite_of_cagliostro.html

5 <http://www.san-leo.it/events/san-leo/2019/alchimialchimie-2019.html>

6 <https://www.terrabici.com/routes/cagliostro-visit-san-leo>

➡ **ROB GANDY** is a visiting professor at the Liverpool Business School, John Moores University and a regular contributor to FT.

PECULIAR POSTCARDS



JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past celebrates a big break for the small Scots who once performed for Queen Victoria herself.

7. THE KISHORN DWARFS

When I purchased, for very little money, a postcard depicting 'The Kishorn Dwarfs', it of course became a priority to find out more about these three elderly-looking people of short stature dressed in rustic Caledonian attire.

Kishorn is a small village situated in Ross-shire. Here lived a poor cotter named John Finlayson with his wife. Although both normally sized, they had three children, all of them dwarfs. The mother 'went off her heid' after her third child was born and swore never to have another, as she feared the local witch had put a curse on her. In 1845, when the three dwarfs were in their teens, they met a showman named William McKenzie, who took them to Inverness and then to London. Their parents accompanied them to Inverness, where they were described in the local newspapers. The eldest, Master Finlay, who was upwards of 20 years old, stood 2ft 10in (86cm) tall. His sister Mary was a few years younger and a good deal shorter. John, 15, was described as a mere pigmy.

A journalist from the *Inverness Courier* predicted a good showbusiness career for the three Kishorn prodigies: "It is ludicrous to see these little creatures sit round their dinner-table; but to observe them dance together, reminds one forcibly of the Celtic accounts of dancing elves, whose fantastic measures so oft beguiled the way-worn Highlander, as he saw, or dreamt he saw, them trip it lightly on the mountain side." The Dwarfs used to help at the local farm, and led rustic and wholesome lives, but now Mr McKenzie wanted to teach them singing, dancing and good



ABOVE LEFT: A postcard with the three Kishorn Dwarfs in old age. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A postcard stamped and posted in Kishorn in 1910, showing Master Finlay, the last of the Kishorn Dwarfs, standing in front of his rustic cottage which still exists today, just south of Courthill.



manners, since he had made an arrangement with a London showman to put them on exhibition there. Since they had spoken only Gaelic in their lives, teaching them English would have been an uphill task.

In May 1846, the Kishorn Dwarfs were exhibited at the Cosmorama Rooms, situated at 209 Regent Street, London. They impressed a journalist from the *Standard* by dancing reels and showing their proficiency with the claymore. Mr McKenzie stood by, ready to tell the visitors about the parentage, history and peculiarities of the three Highland performers. The fact that no other newspaper mentioned them at the time, and that their career remains

unrecorded in any standard work on dwarfism or on London exhibitions, would indicate that their impact on the London amusement scene was a limited one. Still, the youthful Queen Victoria appears to have received the Dwarfs in a special audience at Buckingham Palace.

In due course, they returned to the Highlands to rejoin their parents at their rustic retreat. If they ever visited London again, it remains unrecorded in the newspapers. My postcard shows three gnarled, rustic-looking individuals. According to the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal* of 1894: "It may not be generally known that a family of dwarfs has been living in Applecross, in the West of Ross-shire, for

over half a century now. Mary Finlayson, one of them, died there this week. She was the youngest of the family, which consisted of two brothers, and had reached the age of 65 years. The members of the family vary in height from three feet to three and a half feet (91-107cm), and have appeared before the Queen at frequent intervals during the past 40 years." On Coronation Day 1911, Kishorn had a holiday: in the evening, a large bonfire was lit by Finlay Finlayson, the dwarf who had danced before the late Queen Victoria 65 years ago. The last of the Kishorn Dwarfs died in or around 1915; they are all buried under a gravestone at the old churchyard in Lochcarron.

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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FORT SORTERS

(who classify clippings placed in the Archives for Fortean Research)

Regular Fort Sorts are currently on lockdown hiatus – but please continue to send in your clippings to the new address: PO Box 66598, London, N11 9EN

CLIPPING CREDITS FOR FT396

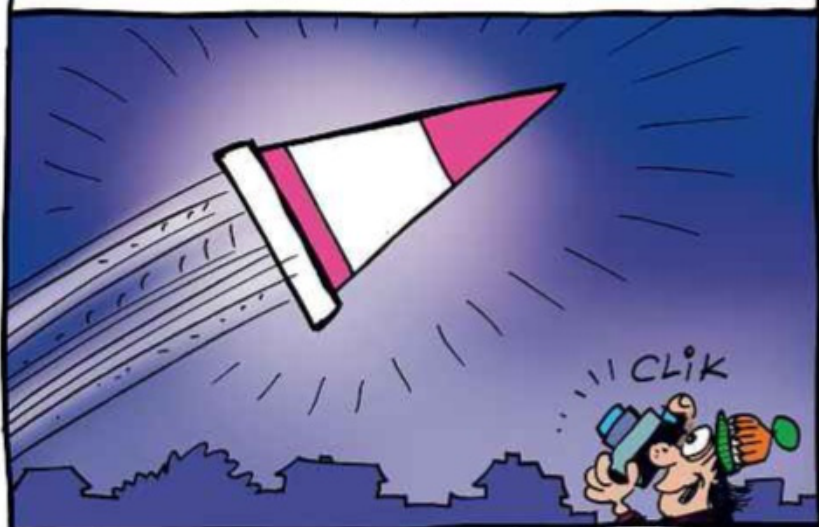
Gerard Apps, David V Barrett, James Beckett, Brian Chapman, Pat Corcoran, Alistair Dobbs, D Furness, Keith George, Richard George, Anne Hardwick, Hugh Henry, Nigel Herwin, Ethan Koil, Andy Lapham, Robin Lee, Dave Malin, Nick Maloret, Heather Robbins, Tom Ruffles, Matt Salusbury, Frank Thomas, Paul Thomas, Owen Whiteoak, Janet Wilson.

PHENOMENOMIX

BONNYBRIDGE UFO

HUNT EMERSON

EARLY 1990s - A UFO EVENT...
A LARGE TRIANGULAR OBJECT IS SEEN
OVER BONNYBRIDGE IN SCOTLAND...



A REPORT
IN THE
LOCAL
PRESS
SAYS THE
OBJECT
WAS
CAUGHT
ON
CAMERA!

THESE
PHOTOGRAPHS
HAVE NEVER
BEEN
SEEN!

WE HAVE
COME
FOR THE
CAMERA!

YEH!
WE
FROM
THE
GOV'MINT!



GULP!

THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
CO-OPERATION!

FOM
DA
GOV'
MINT...



THE CAMERA IS FLOWN BY PRIVATE JET
TO A SECRET U.S. SECURITY BASE...



...WHERE IT IS
INTERROGATED
UNDER BRIGHT
LIGHTS!



THE LIGHTS FOG THE FILM* SO
NO PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE
REMAINS...

SHIT! WHAT
WE GONNA
DO NOW?

IT'S A GODDAM
COMMUNIST PLOT!



* PRE-DIGITAL!

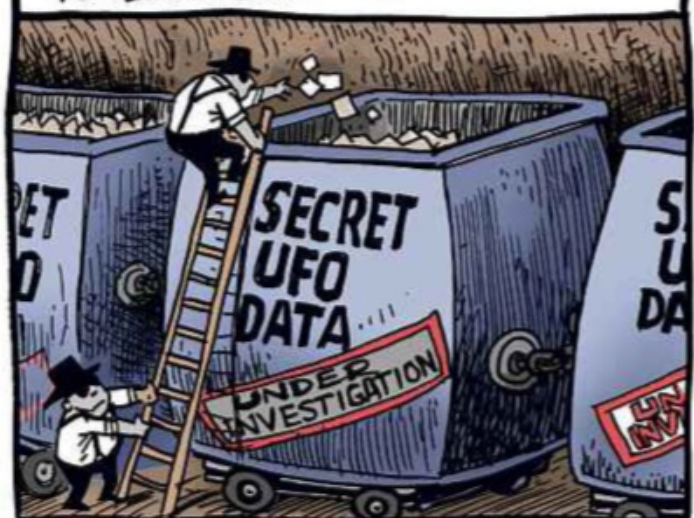
THE GOVERNMENT SECURITY DEPARTMENT
TAKES THE CAMERA'S REFUSAL TO
DIVULGE INFORMATION UNDER DURESS
AS AN ADMISSION OF GUILT...



DEFINITIVE
PROOF OF
UFO EVENTS
SUPPRESSED BY
COVERT
GOVERNMENT
FORCES!



EVIDENCE TO BE LOCKED AWAY
AS PART OF A POLICY OF
GOVERNMENT SECRECY...



BACKTRACK TO
BONNYBRIDGE -
THE DAY OF THE
EVENT...

THE LOCAL YOUTH
HAVE BEEN ENJOYING
A FEW BOTTLES OF
BUCKY AROUND THE
TOWN CENTRE...

BELIEVE ME, THERE'S
BUGGER-ALL TO DO IN
BONNY AFTER
8 O'CLOCK!

A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF ARSING
ABOUT IS GOING ON...



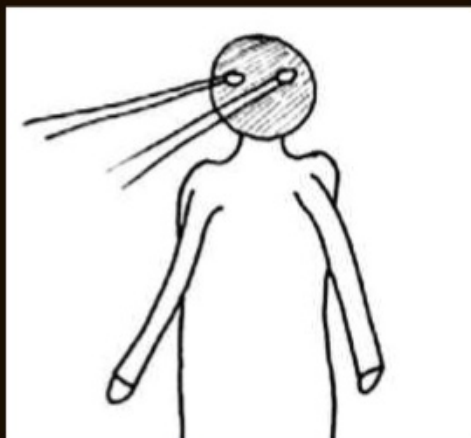
HEY, STUART!
YOU CAN DO A
WEE NEWS
STORY IN YER
WEE NEWSPAPER
- THE BONNY-
BRIDGE BUGLE!
Hahahahaha!

AYE!
I WILL
TOO!
"BONNY
BRIDGE
UFO
SCARE!"
Hahaha!

TWO DAYS
LATER...



COMING NEXT MONTH



ATOM AGE ALIEN

SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF THE
RISLEY SILVER MAN



COVID MARY & FAMILY

CHRISTIAN APPARITIONS IN
THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS



THE GRINNING MEN,
SPORTING GHOSTS,
RESTORATION FAILS
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 397

ON SALE 10 SEPT 2020

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Model and make-up artist Madalyn Davis, 21, departed the UK in October 2019 to go travelling, posting updates to her 14,000 Instagram followers as she went. First Thailand, next, Bali, then on to Australia where a late-night party led to a dawn walk along the Sydney coast. Here, by the cliffs, she fell 100ft (30m) to her death at a 'selfie hotspot'. A global study found that selfies in dangerous locations were responsible for the deaths of 259 people between 2011 and 2017. Since researchers were limited to published reports, it is quite possible that the real figure is much higher.

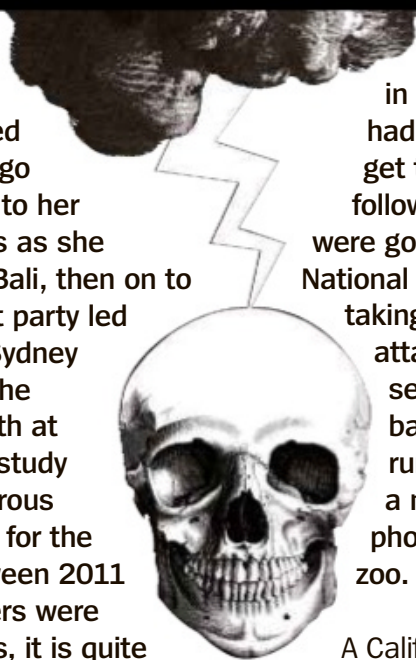
The phenomenon of 'death by selfie' first came to public attention in the UK in June 2017 when language student Hyewon Kim died after asking a stranger to take her photo at the edge of the Seven Sisters cliffs in East Sussex. When police examined the 23-year-old Korean's phone, found near her body at the foot of the cliffs, they found six photos showing her jumping in the air extremely close to the cliff edge. Six months earlier, Nye Newman from Aldershot was killed in Paris on New Year's Eve 2016 while travelling on the Metro. Climbing between train carriages, the 17-year-old's head popped up as he was taking a selfie or a video and was fatally struck by an object. In September 2017, mother-of-two Carmen Greenway was cycling home after celebrating her mother's birthday at a pub. While cycling, she took a smiling selfie, but fell moments later near her home in west London, fracturing her skull. Some days later, she died in hospital. A double selfie fatality occurred at Ericeira, Portugal, in 2018, when Louise Benson, 37, and boyfriend Michael Kearns, 33, both plunged to their deaths while taking selfies from a 100ft (30m) high wall above the beach. They had lost their balance while reaching for a dropped mobile phone. Similarly, in 2019 Jayden Dolman, 20, and Daniel Mee, 25, both died in a selfie attempt when they fell from a cliff at a Costa Blanca resort.

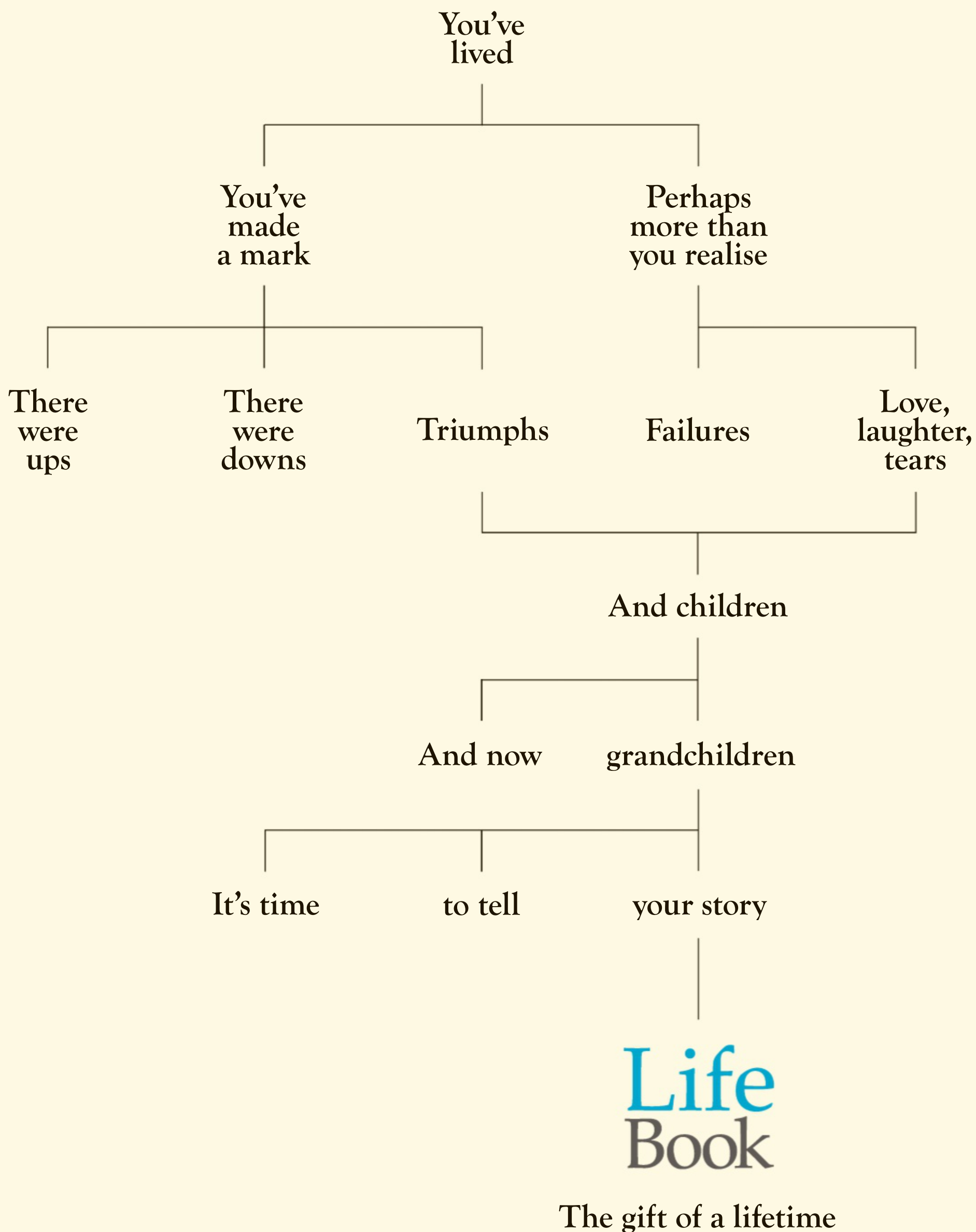
The authors of the study recommend warning notices be placed at hazardous beauty spots, or even designated as 'no-selfie zones'. Such places would include mountain peaks, the top of high buildings, and beside lakes, drowning being the most common cause of selfie-related death. Other common causes are animals and firearms. Selfies with a bear in the background had become so prevalent that

in 2014 the US Forestry Service had to issue a warning not to get too close to the animals. The following year, a total of five people were gored by a bison in Yellowstone National Park; three of them had been taking photos at the time of the attacks. In Pamplona, following several incidents, selfies were banned during the Spanish city's running of the bulls, and in 2016, a man was killed while taking a photo with a walrus in a Chinese zoo. *D.Mail*, 15 Jan 2020.

A Californian man was arrested on suspicion of murder and of attempting to eat his victim's body. Police responding to reports of a disturbance at a residence in Richmond, 16 miles (26km) north of San Francisco, entered the home and found Ruby Wallick, 90, lying on the ground bleeding, with her 37-year-old grandson Dwayne Wallick "straddled" over her and "digging in her flesh". Officers used a Taser to partially subdue the assailant before handcuffing him. Paramedics declared Ruby Wallick dead at the scene with "missing pieces of flesh". An autopsy is expected to determine the cause of death, and whether she was killed before her grandson began his attempts to eat her. Wallick was taken to a hospital for medical evaluation, after which he was to be booked into a detention facility. *abc7news.com*; *dailymail.co.uk*, 2 June 2020.

A 54-year-old man died after being stung by sea urchins during a tropical holiday. Chris Wilson, 54, was kayaking with his wife off the coast of Zanzibar, East Africa, when they capsized. They managed to right the double kayak. Mrs Wilson climbed back in, but her husband was unable to and paddled back to shore where he soon became unwell. The couple, from Dover, Kent, rested on a sun lounger before returning to their hotel room where Mrs Wilson noticed sea urchin stings on her husband's feet. Complaining that he felt sick and that his arms were hurting but refusing to see a doctor, Mr Wilson took some paracetamol and ibuprofen while his wife went outside to read a book. When she returned to the room, he was dead. The cause of death was given as "sea urchin envenomation" and "fatty infiltration of the myocardium". Usually, urchin stings are harmless to humans, but some can be toxic. They may also cause severe allergic reactions in some people. *cambridge-news.co.uk*, 11 Apr; *Sun*, 12 Apr 2020.





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